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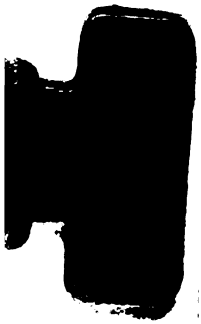
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NORTHERN SPAIN

EDGAR WIGRAM

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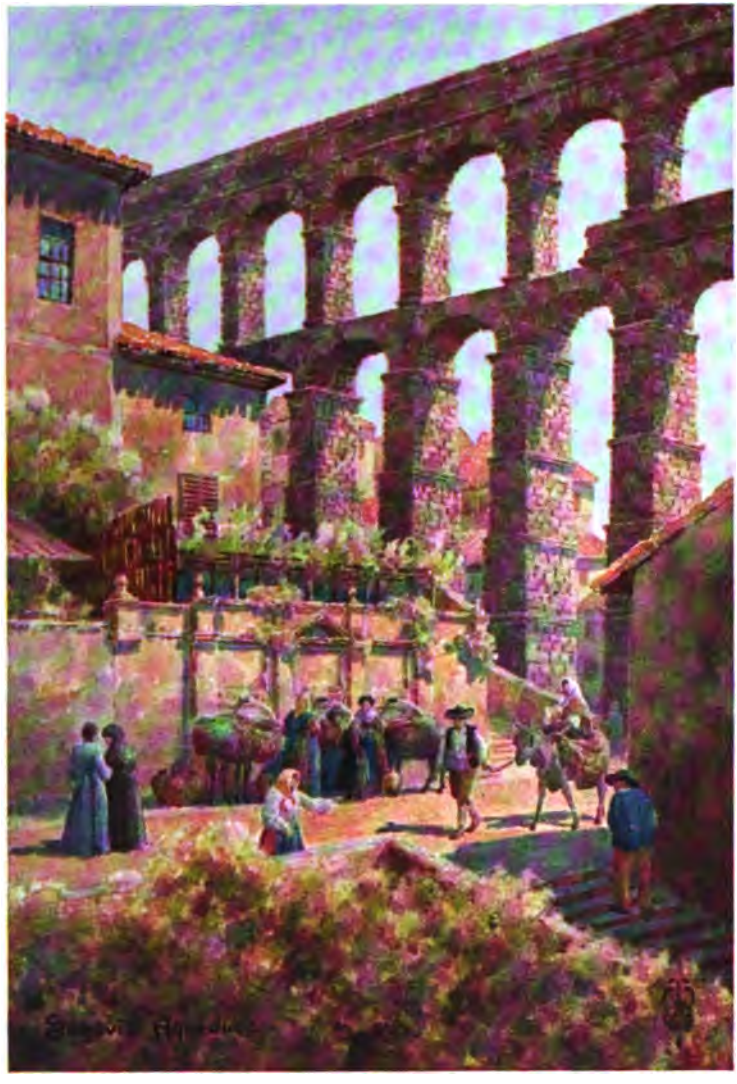
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SEGÓVIA

The Aqueduct.

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EDGAR T. A. WIGRAM



LONDON
ADAM & CHARLES BLACK
1906

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"There is, Sir, a good deal of Spain which has not been perambulated. I would have you go thither."

Dr Johnson.

"And so you travel on foot?" said Leon. "How romantic! How courageous!"

. . . . . .

"Yes," returned the undergraduate, "it's rather nice than otherwise, when once you're used to it; only it's devilish difficult to get washed. I like the fresh air and these stars and things."

"Aha!" said Leon, "Monsieur is an artist."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried the Englishman. "A fellow may admire the stars and be anything he likes."

R. L. Stevenson.

DISCARDED

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To

W. A. W.

SAEPE MECUM TEMPUS IN ULTIMUM

DEDUCTO

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PREFACE

It is ill gleaning for a necessitous author when Ford and Borrow have been before him in the field, and I may not attempt to justify the appearance of these pages by the pretence that I have any fresh story to tell. Yet, if my theme be old, it is at least still unhackneyed. The pioneers have done their work with unapproachable thoroughness, but the rank and file of the travelling public are following but slackly in their train.

Year after year our horde of pleasure-seekers are marshalled by companies for the invasion of Europe: yet it would seem that there are but few in the total who have any real inkling of how to play the game. Some seem to migrate by instinct, and to make themselves miserable in the process. These ought to be restrained by their families, or compelled to hire substitutes in their stead. Others can indeed relish a flitting; but cannot find it in

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their hearts to divorce themselves from their dinner-table and their toilet-battery, their newspaper, their small-talk and their golf. To them all petty annoyances and inconveniences assume disproportionate dimensions, and they are well advised in checking their *razzias* at San Sebástien, Pau, or Biarritz. But, to the elect, the very root of the pleasure of travel lies in the fact that their ordinary habits may be frankly laid aside. It is a mild method of "going *Fanti*" which rejoices their primitive instincts: and they will find both the land and the people just temperately primitive in Spain.

Many of us have felt the fascination of Italy. But those who have "heard the East a-calling" tell us that her call is stronger still;—and Spain is the echo of the East. "Lofty and sour to them that love her not, but to those men that seek her sweet as summer." Even Italy, with all its charm, tastes flat to a Spanish enthusiast. He craves no other nor no better land.

. . . . . .

It has been said of Spain, that none who have not been there are particularly desirous of going,

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and none who have been there once can refrain from going again. The author has not found himself exempt from this common fatality; and his notes and sketches, as embodied in this volume, are the fruit of four successive bicycle tours, undertaken sometimes alone, and sometimes in company with a kindred spirit. Of their shortcomings he believes that no one can be so conscious as himself. But in the hope that they may prove of interest to sympathisers he ventures to expose them to the public gaze.

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NOTE

ALL Spanish names ending in vowels are pronounced with the stress on the penultimate; and those ending in consonants with the stress on the final syllable. Any exception is indicated by an accent.

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The design of the Cover is adapted from the façade of the Casa de las Conchas (House of the Shells) at Salamanca.

The device on the Title Page is taken from a wrought-iron knocker of the Cathedral at Toledo.

The illustrations in this volume have been engraved and printed in England by Messrs Carl Hentschel, Ltd.

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NORTHERN SPAIN

CHAPTER I

THE NORTH COAST OF CASTILE

DEAR E.,—Can you manage to get off some time in May and go bicycling with me in Norway? Blank's have offered me a passage to Bergen.

. . . . . .

DEAR W.,—I can manage your date, but don't quite feel drawn to your country. Norway is all mountains, and I want a little archæology. I had been thinking of Provence.

. . . . . .

DEAR E.,—No objection to Provence. Blank's will give us a passage in one of their colliers to Bilbao, and we can ride in across the Pyrenees. You must allow me some mountains.

. . . . . .

DEAR W.,—It's awfully good of Blank's. But once at Bilbao, why not stick to Spain? Toledo

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is no further than Toulouse, and Cantabria as mountainous as the Pyrenees.

. . . . . .

DEAR E., — Very good! Spain first; and Provence second string if necessary. There's a boat sailing about May 20th.

. . . . . .

The casting vote was indisputably the collier's; but our plans were not quite so inconsequent as this conclusion might lead one to infer. Some nebulous notion of a Spanish expedition had been miraging itself before our eyes for several seasons previously; and it is the nature of such nebulous notions to materialise accidentally at the last. Hitherto we had been awed by the drawbacks; for Spain had been pictured to us as positively alive with bugbears. Travelling was difficult — nay, even dangerous; the people were Anglophobists, the country a desert, and the cities dens of pestilence. The roads were unridable, and the heat unbearable. We should be eaten of fleas, and choked with garlic; and to crown all our other tribulations, we should have to learn a new and unknown tongue. The knight who plunged into the lake of pitch had hardly a more inviting

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prospect; and the fairy palaces beneath it did not yield him an ampler reward. Provence still waits unvisited; neither have we now any immediate intention of going there. We still keep going to Spain.

. . . . . .

The owners said she would sail on Thursday; but Wednesday brought down the captain in a highly energetic condition, and confident of catching the midnight tide. We had to make a bolt for the docks by the last train of the evening, and groped our way to the *Amadeo* through a haze of coal dust, only to be met by the intelligence that the captain had gone home to bed! There was nothing for it but to camp in the cabin, where night was made constantly hideous by the coal roaring into the after-hold: and next morning found us out in the middle of the dock, sitting on our tail with our bows pointing to heaven. The coal for the fore-hold had failed us, and a luckier rival had ousted us from our berth at the staithes. The morning was occupied in resolving a general tangle; for every ship in the basin seemed to fall foul of all the others in turn. Soon a second tide was lost. And when we regained the staithes there came another break in our procession of coal

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trucks. "Oh! the little cargo boats that clear with *every* tide!"

We flung ashore in despair. But a more hopeful sight saluted us when we returned. The *Amadeo* lay out by the dock gates, long and low, with her main deck but eighteen inches above the water. At last she was fully laden; and we sailed on the Friday morn.

So long as we remained in Tyne Dock we had not judged ourselves conspicuously dirty; but we showed as a crying scandal when out in the clean blue sea. The mate even bewailed the calm weather. If we "took it green" once we should be clean immediately. But such heroic methods of labour-saving we very contentedly excused. Meanwhile we made leisurely progress, for the *Amadeo* was no greyhound. "She never yet caught anything with steam in her" according to her despondent engineer. Saturday's sun set behind Dover—the great cliffs looming darkly over us, and the town lights showing like pin-holes pricked through the blackness to the glowing sky beyond. Sunday showed us the grim teeth of the Caskets; and the weird natural dolmens of Ushant were passed the following day. But Providence still continued to temper the wind to that very

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shorn lamb the *Amadeo*, and the dreaded Bay was as smooth as a sheet of rippled glass.

About Wednesday evening the captain began to wax very bitter concerning Spanish lighthouses, and we went below better satisfied that deep water should last us till dawn! But the first rays of light showed us a long line of blue peaks high on the horizon to the southward, and within an hour our voyage was over. "In we came—and time enough—'cross Bilbao bar."

It was from the sea that I had my first view of Genoa and the Italian Riviera, and the seaward approach to Bilbao deserves no meaner comparison than this. The romantic hills reared themselves from the water's edge, unwinding their veils at the touch of the early sunshine; and the sparkling villages clinging to the cliffs round the shell-shaped harbour of Portugalete made a picture which might have been borrowed from Lugano or Lucerne. A tumult of tossing peaks was piled in disorder to the eastward, above the smoke of the iron furnaces in the winding valley of the Nervion; and far away to the westward, ridge upon ridge fell sloping down into the blue waters of the Atlantic; sometimes breaking off so sheer at the finish that the ore ships could actually moor

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alongside to load. The beauty of the Spanish coast is a favourite theme of visitors to San Sebástien, but they know not a tithe of the truth which they are so eager to proclaim. The whole Atlantic littoral from the Bidassoa to the Miño is teeming with equal attractions, and the immediate vicinity of Bilbao is a stretch which is second to none.

Neither were our first impressions of the people less favourable than those of the country. And that though they were formed in the Custom House, which is scarcely a promising beat. These hospitable officials were if anything over-considerate; for we were only anxious to pay and have done with it, while they were all intent on excusing us, if they could find any justification under the code. At last, however, we were allowed to purchase our freedom; fled to our machines amid a haze of reciprocal compliments; and a few minutes later were drifting along the road to the westward, with no more care for the morrow than flotsam on uncharted seas.

The busy industries of Bilbao have unfortunately gone some way towards marring its lovely situation. Its valley is choked with smoky factories; and its mountains are one vast red scar from base to

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The Bilbao Coastline.

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summit, the entire face having been flayed away for ironstone, and ladled out into the ore ships along the aërial railways to feed the blast furnaces of Sheffield and Middlesborough. Our uglier trades seem to take malicious delight in ruining the prettiest landscapes. But their dominion is but for a season, and the land will enjoy its Sabbaths in the end. We only scratch Nature skin-deep, and her wealds will devour our black countries. "After a thousand years," say the Spaniards, "the river returns to his bed."

Beyond the blight of the quarries, the scenery is of the type of our own Welsh highlands—steep, rocky ridges and gullies, thickly clothed with bracken and scrub oak. Even the railway has a most charming ramble, hunting its own tail up and down the long, steep, corkscrew gradients of the inland valleys. But the road clambers along the deeply fissured coast line, and no free agent will elect to follow the rail. Our first stage, however, was but a short one, for it was evening when we quitted Bilbao. Castro Urdiales gaped for us with its cavernous little *calle*, and we dived in to seek quarters for the night.

Surely a town so close to Bilbao might have been expected to be inured to visitors! Yet our

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modest progress through the streets of Castro created as great a sensation as though we had been "Corsica" Boswell in his costume of scarlet and gold. The children formed up in procession behind us. Their elders turned out to take stock of us from the balconies. And a voluble old pilot (whose knowledge of English was about equal to our Spanish) came bustling out of a café to conduct us to the primitive little inn.

It is a fortunate thing that a traveller's needs can be guessed without much vocabulary; for our first task was to order our supper, and mistakes may be serious when you have to eat the result. The enterprise, however, is not so hazardous as one imagines. Like Sancho Panza, you may ask for what you will;—but what you get is "the pair of cow heels dressed with chick peas, onions and bacon which are just now done to a turn." After all, we did not fare badly; mine hostess was a damsel of resources, and our old pilot prompted us vigorously from the rear. It was he who suggested the "lamp-post"—a threat at which we jibbed somewhat visibly. But the girl plunged promptly into the kitchen behind her and returned displaying the "lamp-post"—which was a lobster. As to the three weird courses which followed him, our

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conclusions were not equally positive. They appeared in cryptic disguises;—*carne*, "meat" which defied identification. There is no declaration of origin in most of the dishes of Spain. Yet the traveller need not be nervous. He can generally trust Maritornes. Let him eat what is set before him, asking no questions for conscience sake.

One might travel a long way along any coast line before finding a prettier haven than Castro Urdiales. The nucleus of the town, with the church and castle, is perched upon a rocky promontory, whose cliffs drop sheer into the deep water, and whose outlying pinnacles have been linked up to the mainland by irregular arches so as to form natural wharves. A little harbour for fishing-craft nestles under the cliff to the eastward; looking back along the coast to Bilbao, and the bold conical hill with the watch-tower (reminiscent of Barbary pirates), which guards the entrance to the harbour of Portugalete. Yet all this fair exterior hides a hideous secret, and at last we surprised it unaware.

We were well acquainted with sardines in England, and it had not escaped our cognisance that sardines were commonly bereft of heads.

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Had it ever occurred to us that all those heads were somewhere? Well, the dreadful truth must be acknowledged; they were here. Yes, here at Castro Urdiales—a mountain of gibbous eyes and a smell to poison the heavens—awaiting the kindly wave which would eventually garner them in from the ledge upon which they were stewing, and deliver them over to the "lamp-posts" in the crevices of the rock below.

Castro Urdiales is a city of ambitions. It is keeping pace with the era, and in 1901 its most antiquated alley had been already dignified by the title of "Twentieth Century Street." Since then it has developed a ponderous steel bridge in the harbour, and thrown out a massive concrete breakwater from the end of the modest jetty. But its progress is not to be deprecated where it does not interfere with its beauty; and now a comfortable *Fonda* has supplanted the humble *Venta* which was our first lodging on Spanish soil.

Our road next day still followed the mountainous coast line, and we descended at noon upon the roofs of Laredo, a delightful little town, climbing up the steep hillside above its tiny anchorage, and facing the great mass of Santoña, the "Gibraltar of the North." This imposing fortress lies across

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CASTRO URDIÁLES

The Harbour.

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the mouth of an immense land-locked lagoon, and in size, shape, and situation is almost a replica of the famous Rock. It has no such strategical value, but is probably equally impregnable; for it was the only northern city where the French flag was still waving at the close of that "War of Liberation" which we style the Peninsular War.

At Laredo we dined, and as Spanish meals are the subject of much needless apprehension, perhaps we may pause to say a word in their defence before proceeding further upon our way. We begin with *Desayuno* or *petit déjeuner*, and here, in a genuinely Spanish *ménage*, chocolate will generally take the place of the Frenchman's *café au lait*. It is served in tiny cups, very hot and very thick. It is really a substitute for butter, and you eat it by dipping your bread in it, washing it down with a glass of cold water, which you are expected to "sugar to taste." The peasants, however, eschew this fashion as new-fangled, and content themselves with a draught of wine or a thimbleful of "the craythur." This is not recommended by the faculty, but travellers have sometimes to be content.

Dinner, or *Comida*, is served about mid-day; the nominal time varies, but it is always half an

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hour late. In many districts, however, this title is transferred to the supper, and then the luncheon is known as *Almuerzo—Déjeuner*. It is a very substantial banquet of some half-dozen courses, inaugurated (in strictly classical fashion) by an egg. Next comes a dish of haricot beans, or chick peas, or rice garnished with *pimientos*, closely pursued by another containing boiled meat, bacon, and sausages, all which you may tackle separately or simultaneously, according to your greatness of soul. Then comes a stew—the celebrated *Olla Podrida*; and then (to the great astonishment of the stranger) the belated fish. Fish seems to have methods of penetrating to all spots which are accessible by railway. Hake is the general stand-by, but in the mountains you get most excellent little trout. The solid portion of the meal is concluded by a "biftek" and salad, but there is still an appendix in case you are not satisfied yet. On Sundays, in superior *Fondas* you will get caramel pudding, and always and everywhere cheese, accompanied by a sort of quince jelly known as *membrillo*, a very excellent institution indeed. Finally (again classically) comes the fruit; but this is usually rather inferior, considering how very cheap and excellent it is in the markets outside. Wine is,

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of course, supplied *ad lib.* to every diner, and water in porous earthenware bottles which evaporation keeps deliciously cool. Olives are eaten steadily at all intervals; and if you have long to wait between courses, you fill up the intervals with cigarettes! The evening meal — *cena* — is generally very similar to the mid-day, except that soup takes the place of the egg.

The cooking is by no means deserving of all the strictures that have been showered upon it; for most nations know how to cook their own dishes, and only come seriously to grief when they try to imitate French. The dreaded garlic is used but sparingly; oil is a much more dominating feature. But then oil has a double debt to pay, because Spaniards make no butter. At all events the food is plentiful, and "St Bernard's sauce" will cover a multitude of deficiencies; for appetite is a blessing that is seldom lacking to the traveller in Spain!

After dinner, the Café. And a Spanish café is a most noteworthy assemblage. It is comparatively empty in the evenings, for the Spaniard's homing instincts are much more strongly developed than the Frenchman's, and he seldom quits his house and his family circle after dark. But in the early afternoon it is thronged to repletion with all

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sorts and conditions of customers, from the general in command of the garrison to the ragged vine-dresser and muleteer. Here they sit through the long, sultry hours of siesta-tide in a roomful of shuttered twilight, chattering like a mill-wheel in flood-time, sipping their coffee and aniseed brandy,[1] and steadily consuming cigarettes. It often seems mild dissipation for such very truculent-looking desperadoes. Fancy an English navvy regaling his carnal appetites on black coffee and dominoes! Not but that dominoes (as played in a Spanish café) is an exciting, even an athletic, pastime. It entails alarming vociferation; and every piece that you play must be slammed down on the marble table top with all the force at your command. The domino volleys echo through the café like musketry on a field-day on Salisbury Plain, and if you feel at all dubious as to your direction when you chance to be seeking that edifice, you may readily succeed in locating it by listening in the street for the din.

But the heat of the day is now passing, and the traveller must answer the call. His road is at

[1] "Infernal *anis*," says the advertisement, "made from the worst wines of the Priorato, is neither tonic, digestive, nor restorative, and has never been commended at any exhibition."

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least more level than hitherto; for the coast hills westward of Laredo are gradually losing their mountainous character, and over their heads to the southward we begin to catch glimpses of the great rock walls of the Cantabrian Sierras, which grow ever higher and grander as we near the Asturian march. The environs of Santander are again disfigured by quarrying; and the soil, where disturbed, is of a deep red ferruginous hue. Truly "a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass"; though "rivers and fountains of water" are not quite so common as we might desire. Santander itself, however, we will avoid altogether. Like Bilbao, it is quite a modern city; and the direct road through the mountain glens behind it brings us down to the sea again at Torrelavega by a very much pleasanter line.

Meanwhile we pursued our career to an intermittent orchestral accompaniment—a tune in two keys, like M'Alpin's drone and small pipes, but far more powerful and piercing than the most brazen-lunged piper could blow. Occasionally we met the musician. He is only an ordinary ox-cart —a pair of wheels, a pole, and a plank or two, actuated by a pair of sleepy kine.

In Galicia the yoke is fastened round the necks

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of the oxen; but more generally it is bound with thongs to their horns and finished off with a bonnet of goat-skin, or in Asturias with a fleecy busby of most imposing size. The wheels have often only a single spoke, or sometimes three arranged in the form of the letter H. Altogether it is probably the simplest, slowest, and most vociferous affair on wheels.

For the amount of lamentation that can be extracted from one dry axle is a thing that is scarcely credible even when it is heard. The natives encourage it. They have one theory that it pleases the oxen, and another (far more probable) that it scares the Fiend. But at any rate it has no apparent effect upon the Spanish teamster, who lounges along in front waving his goad like a drum-major's baton; or sleeps—yes, sleeps—on the summit of his yelling load. Verily the man who first invented sleep must have been a waggoner! This evening, as we were crossing the ridge between two parallel valleys, our ears were saluted by the unmistakable long-drawn scream of an impatient locomotive. Our map showed no railway, however; and we were just beginning to plume ourselves on an important geographical discovery, when we caught sight of a single ox-cart—200 feet

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below and half a mile away! The hill sloped away straight and smooth before us, and we fled! We felt no shame at the time; yet perhaps it was rather faint-hearted to shirk the chance of a personal interview with the most musical axle in the world.

But the bicyclist has one grievance in Spain which is not so easily avoided as ox-carts, and it is about the end of the second day that the iron of it begins to enter his soul. Thenceforward for ever he cherishes a deadly and undying rancour against the Spanish dogs. We had been partly prepared for the infliction beforehand. The captain had mentioned them, and had talked of ammonia pistols; but we spurned the suggestion with humane horror. We knew quite well that all foreign dogs were brutes, but we were confident in our own benignity and scornful of "methods of barbarism." And in these noble sentiments we persisted—for about a day and a half. Next morning we were awakened out of our beauty sleep by the yellings of some miserable cur in the *Fonda patio*;—"Hurrah! there's a dog getting hurt," was our simultaneous comment; and ere we recrossed the frontier we had registered a grim resolve that next time we would bring revolvers,

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and strew our path with carcases from Fuenterrabia to Cadiz. So much for the deterioration of moral fibre under the strain of Spanish dog.

Well, we are not the first (nor the last) whose amiability has been ruined by "dogs barking at us as we pass by"; and when every brute in the countryside, from the toy mongrel to the wolf-hound as big as an ass-colt, dances yelling and snapping at your heels for half a mile together, it is not entirely surprising that patience should wear thin. Of course there are stones. The Guadarrama district in particular produces a beautiful white quartzose,—hard and heavy, with many sharp angles,—an excellent article to throw at a dog. But what is a pocketful among so many? Besides, you often miss them, and never hurt them enough. Truly I could feel no sure confidence in anything short of a loaded revolver. But only a very even-tempered man could trust himself with that *ultima ratio* within reach of his fingers; and I cherish a rooted objection to "going heeled" in a civilised land. Perhaps a lion-tamer's whip with a loaded butt and a bullet at the end of the lash may prove effective enough to compromise upon.

Meanwhile there is some silver lining to the cloud. There are already some convertites among

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the dogs of Spain. The majority pour themselves upon the cyclist, clamorous and open-mouthed, like the demons in Malebolge; but a remnant clap their tails between their legs and make a bee-line for the horizon. We humbly hope that our own modest assiduity will have effected a small but perceptible increase in the latter class.

Beyond Torrelavega there is again a parting of roadways. One passes along the coast by Santillana, the birthplace of Gil Blas; and the other through Cabezon, threading the mountain glens. They reunite at San Vicente de la Barquera, another minor seaport of Cantabria, less progressive than Castro, but quite as attractive after its style. The town lies at the extremity of a tongue of land between two wide estuaries. It is the meeting-place of the two long bridges which cross them, and its precipitous acropolis and arcaded market-place afford endless studies to the lover of the picturesque.

San Vicente had got a hideous secret of its own as well as Castro, only at San Vicente it was hardly a secret—in fact, they were rather booming it as a show. An old sunken coasting vessel had recently been recovered and beached in the estuary, and its hold was positively teeming with

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lobsters, like Sir Thomas Ingoldsby's pockets with eels. Truly it was a gruesome sight; and a novelist in search of an appropriate ending for a really desperate villain could hardly do better than have him pincered to death in that crawly inferno by the black clanking monsters which inhabited it!

The Cantabrian Sierras, already sufficiently majestic, now reach their culmination in the acknowledged monarchs of the range—the Picos de Europa, the landmark of all the old navigators who once steered their Mexican argosies into Gijon or Santander. This vast mass of snow-crowned peaks forms a most imposing spectacle. They are great "cloud compellers," and are seldom entirely clear. But they are sometimes seen unveiled in the calm of the early morning, an apparently impassable barrier filling half the horizon towards the south.

Yet the road which we have taken to guide us aims right at the very heart of them, and at the little village of Unquera it bears up square to the left. A copious sea-green river (officially known as the Tina Mayor, but invariably styled the Deva by the inhabitants) comes hurrying down at this point from the mountains, and charges the great ridge of limestone which edges the coast-line like a natural sea-wall. We look in vain for the outlet:

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SAN VICENTE DE LA BARQUERA

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the barrier seems absolutely unbroken. But a stream that has pierced the Picos recks little of minor obstacles, and the waves are booming to welcome it but half a mile beyond.

Turning our backs on the sea, we enter a noble valley, walled in by crags of Alpine grandeur, and populated by families of Imperial eagles swinging to and fro their eyries, high amid the cornices of rock; but the pastures at the foot of the steeps are everywhere level and placid, and from Unquera up to Abándames can scarcely be called an ascent.

There is a waters-meet just above Abándames, and the traveller as he approaches it begins to experience considerable misgivings concerning the future of his road. If it will but condescend to follow the valley, there seems just a chance that it may emerge as a staircase; but when it bears resolutely to the left to knock its head against the precipices of the Picos, he resignedly concludes that now there's nothing for it but a lift. A deep notch in the crags lets out the river, and here the road slips in. There seems every prospect that it will be promptly confronted by a precipice and a waterfall; but beyond the first notch is a second, and beyond the second a third. At every turn the

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passage grows narrower and deeper, and the way is never clear before us for more than a few score yards. Yet the unhoped-for outlet is invariably forthcoming, and at last we cease to marvel at the unfailing surprise. It is the great cañon of the Deva, one of the finest passes in the world.

It is but a few miles since we quitted sea level, and we have risen but little on the way. Yet the cliffs that edge the roadway make but one leap of it to the clouds, and their tops are streaked with snow. Here rises a staircase of gigantic terraces; here a fringe of crooked fingers, black and jagged against the sky; here a range of sheer bluff bastions, like the *cubos*[1] of a titanic wall; and from time to time the glittering crest of some remoter peak peers over their shoulders into the depths of the gulf below. The mountain limestone is as hard as granite, and has shed but few screes or boulders to obstruct the passage of the stream, and the road squeezes itself along whichever bank happens to be widest at the moment, crossing and recrossing as occasion requires. At one point a magnificent osprey, looking twice as large as life, came sailing slowly down the chasm, and passed

[1] Literally "Tubs," the solid semicircular bastions of Spanish town walls.

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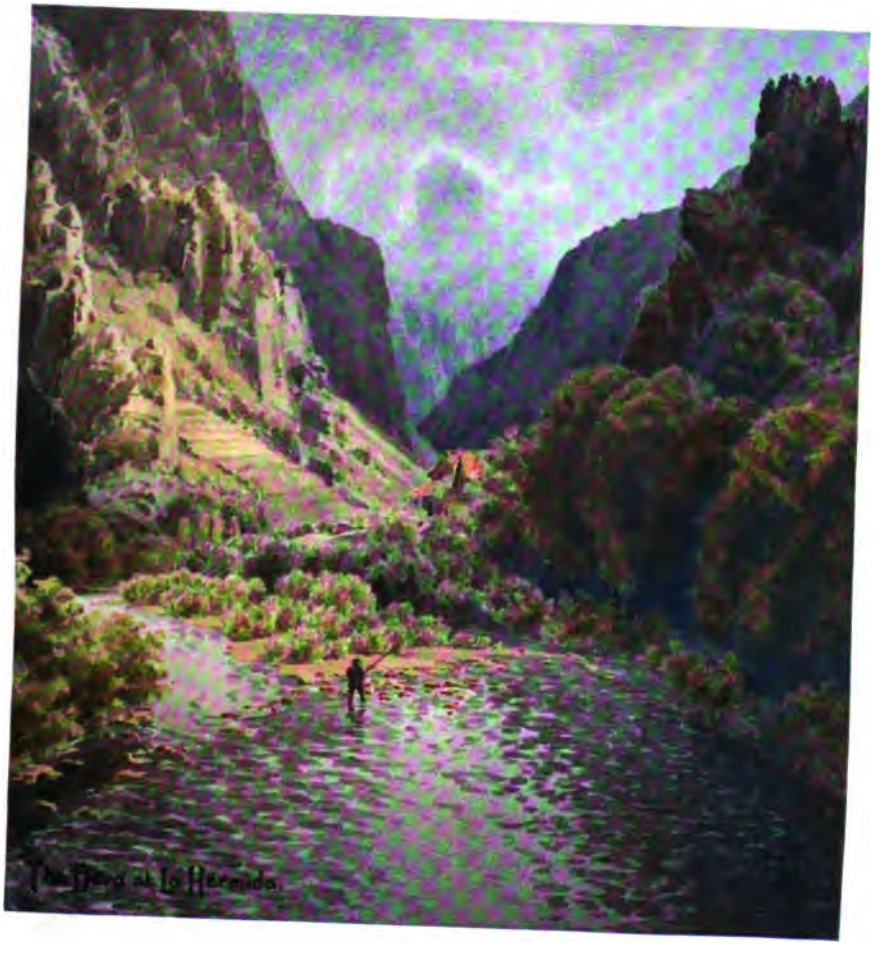
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THE DEVA GORGE

La Hérmida.



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but a few feet above our heads, regally indifferent to the presence of trespassers in his domain. But apart from him the passage was practically solitary —mile after mile of the same stupendous scenery, till our necks ached from craning up the precipices, and our minds seemed oppressed with a sort of hopelessness of escape.

At the hamlet of la Hermida the valley makes a momentary attempt to widen; but this little ebullition is promptly squashed in the grip of the mountains, and the great beetling cliffs once more shoulder in upon the defile. The effects seemed finer than ever, for the clouds of a gathering tempest were tearing themselves to ribbons among the jagged *aiguilles*, and their streamers were pierced and illuminated by the level rays of the setting sun. Not till we had burrowed our way for some fifteen miles through the roots of the mountains did we escape at last into the upland vale of Liebana; and looking back on the snow-wreathed fangs behind us, wondered (like Ali Baba before his cavern) what had become of the crevice from which we had just emerged.

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CHAPTER II

COVADONGA AND EASTERN ASTURIAS

FAR be it from me to disparage Vizcaya or Galicia, but the prize "for the fairest" must be awarded to Asturias. No other province in Spain—few even in Italy—can show such wealth of natural beauty; and it is the district around the Picos de Europa that is the crowning glory of the whole.

The stranger pays his homage to its scenery, but for the Spaniard it has a more sentimental appeal. This great mountain citadel is his Isle of Athelney, the last refuge of the little band of stalwarts who never bowed the knee to the dominion of Mahound. Here the first gleam of victory broke the long darkness of disaster; and seven years after the downfall of Roderic, Pelayo began the redemption of Spain. It still remains a place of pilgrimage; for Our Lady herself fought from Heaven against the infidel upon that momentous day. Her miraculous image, in its extravagant tinsel nimbus

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and stiff brocaded gown, holds its state over the High Altar in the *Colegiata*,[1] and its picture adorns the walls of half the cottages in Asturias. Decidedly no tour would be complete without a visit to Covadonga.

I had lingered sketching in the rocky labyrinth of the Deva till the failing light would no longer serve my turn. Darkness would be upon me ere I could emerge from its recesses; but I had not been caught unaware, for the gully can boast an occasional *venta*, and I had resolved to trust the resources of the little inn at Urdon.

Urdon consists of a single house, and that, to be strictly accurate, is only half a house, for it abuts straight upon the vertical face of the precipice, and the naked rock is its inner wall. If anything disturbed that rock (quoth mine hostess airily, as she handed me my candlestick), Urdon would become an omelet. And perhaps that fate is in store for it eventually, for the rocks do drop an occasional sugar-plum into the valley at their feet.

Urdon looks up a bend of the river, and faces southerly; yet for six months in the year no ray of direct sunshine falls upon that little red roof. It

[1] A collegiate church, intermediate in dignity between a parish church and a cathedral.

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is only from near the zenith that the sun can peer into so deep a well. The traveller plumps upon it suddenly round an abrupt corner, and "here," thinks he, "is the most secluded nook in all the habitable globe." Yet Urdon is the hub of the universe to Tresviso—its inn, its post-office, its commercial emporium, the one link that unites it with the balance of mankind. The pathway to Tresviso struggles up the tiny gully which debouches upon the main gorge at Urdon; but Tresviso itself lies high above the cloud wreaths, a good hard three-hours climb. The Tresvisans aver that there is another village, Sontres, some hours above them. Perhaps there is something above Sontres;—but this imagination boggles at.

The little shop was thronged with a company of Tresvisan women. They had been to the market at Potes to sell their cheeses,—a sort of gorgonzola, and excellent feeding for a zoophagist,—and had paused at the stair-foot of their Nephelococcygia to wipe something off the slate before returning home. Sturdy active figures, clad in patched and weather-stained garments which had once been bright-coloured, they formed a striking group which would have attracted attention anywhere. Their features were hard yet not ill-favoured, and their

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THE DEVA GORGE

Urdon.

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skins as brown as mahogany; but there was not a grey hair nor a wrinkle among them all. Perhaps they were younger than they looked, but they are a long-lived race in the mountains; and even their octogenarians are capable of running errands to Urdon.

"'Try not the path,' the old man said." And the path in question was steep and narrow and stony, wriggling up along the brink of the torrent and the brow of the precipice; the little party had done some nine hours' journeying already, and the shades of night had fallen. Yet for them and their beasts it was but the fag end of their regular Monday tramp, and they made naught of it. Evidently when the "blue-eyed youth" flourishes off with his banner a-climbing the Picos, the maiden of Tresviso is not likely to be vastly impressed. She takes that walk with her grandfather on Sunday afternoons.

The inn at Urdon may be small, but at least it is commendably early. They sped their parting guest with the twilight, and I was well clear of the gorge before I caught my first glimpse of the sun. The mists had not yet bestirred themselves to gather on the sides of the mountains; and the whole line of peaks stood out sharp and clear as I

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crossed the bridge at Abándames and headed westward up the left bank of the Cares, which joins the Deva at the waters-meet below the gorge.

Just beyond the gash that marks the exit of the Deva, a prominent peak, like a small cousin of the Matterhorn, stands out boldly into the centre of the valley. The river circles round from behind it, and the road once more plunges in among the roots of the hills.

But that the Deva cliffs still towered overwhelmingly in the memory, one would have declared it impossible for any ravine to be finer than this. Indeed, in many respects the Cares is complementary of its rival. Its rocks may be less terrific, but its slopes are more generously wooded, and its pale sea-green waters seem of ampler volume than the sister-stream. The river boils along beside the road in a deep, rocky trench—a series of rapids and pot-holes—a dangerous river for a swim; and every turn that it takes opens some new and wonderful vista—huge buttresses of precipitous limestone, and shaggy floods of pinewood pouring out of the gaps between.

The Cares gorge is hardly so long as the Deva's; but it ekes out its interest in an appendix which is not much inferior to the text. The road begins

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to heave itself slowly upward along the face of the mountain towards the saddle at the head of the valley; and every foot that it rises seems to magnify the grandeur of the opposing heights. Now at last the upper slopes of the Picos surge into sight above their terraced pedestal; and far away into the distance behind us ridge after ridge in endless series radiates out from the great central chaos which towers close and high across the vale. This final view from the culminating point of the roadway is one of the most striking of all.

In Spain it seems never permissible to travel entirely for pleasure. The gossips provide you a business if you have none ready to hand. In the Rioja district you are branded as a wine-bibber. In the Asturias you are promptly consigned to the mines. Such was my fate at Carreño, the little hamlet which sits astride the watershed. An aged crone was squatting on the hearth in the *Venta*, performing the functions of a meat-jack over the smouldering embers of the fire. She unhesitatingly diagnosed my profession, and at once began to reel off the local directory—Don Jorge, and Don Juan, and Don Jaime and his wife and family — all English mining engineers in the various villages around. Everybody seems to know everybody

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else in Asturias and to speak of them familiarly by their Christian names. But this latter custom is practically universal in the Peninsula; and I have surprised myself figuring as Don Edgâr on the strength of a second day's stay.

However, rather to "mine aunt's" bewilderment, I did not linger at Carreño. The descent to Cángas lay before me, and I was soon speeding on the way. This valley is of a less daring type of beauty than that which debouches at Abándames. It is wider, shallower, and shadier, and moulded in gentler curves. The Picos are still upon the left, but they are now growing more distant; and the most prominent feature is the parallel range upon the right, between them and the sea; a fine bold line of hills some four thousand feet high known as the Sierra de Cuera.

Presently I became conscious of an ox-cart. It was grinding along the road in front of me. I overhauled it rapidly, and was close up when it arrived at the turn. But when the road straightened, behold! it was entirely empty; and a second glance showed the cart-wheels peeping over the margin, and the driver gathering himself together out of the bushes beyond. The oxen, maddened by flies, had made a dash for a pool at the road-

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side, and the whole equipage had incontinently turned turtle.

The accident was entirely the fault of the beasts, and one would not have been surprised if the man had been angry. But this rough-looking fellow took his mishap with admirable equanimity, and thanked me most impressively for my help in righting his cart. "*Gracias a Dios* that I was thrown clear!" said he, crossing himself, as I approached him. And he even spared some sympathy for his oxen, "Ah! but they annoy them greatly—the flies." The Spanish peasant is not usually of a surly temper, and even a double back somersault may leave his manners in working trim. Once before it had been my lot to witness a similar accident in England, where the driver, just extricated from beneath his vehicle, was indignantly demanding his hat. The incident was not without humour, and was gratifying to a student of Dickens; but it struck me that "*Gracias a Dios*" was distinctly a happier phrase.

Cángas de Onis, the little town which was the goal of my day's journey, boasts that it was once the capital of Spain. And so it was—in the sense that Caerleon was of England—for here Pelayo first established his modest court when all the

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rest of the Peninsula was Mahommedan. The days of its greatness, however, are too remote to have left much trace. It still retains its lovely situation; but a few rude monastic fragments are the only relics left by its early kings. It boasts, however, one striking monument (more modern than Pelayo), in the grand old mediæval bridge; one of those lofty gable-shaped structures that are so typical of Southern countries, and perhaps, next to Orense, the finest example of its kind in Spain. Like most of its class, it is now little used, for the modern bridge is but a few yards distant. And, indeed, none of them could ever have accommodated wheel traffic, for they are steep and narrow, and frequently innocent of parapets. Bar archery, one can well believe that Diego Garcia de Paredes with his two-handed sword might have held such a pass against a host; though (in justice to that doughty warrior's modesty, so highly commended by the curate) I believe his autobiography never states that he actually did.

A most attractive-looking road leads up the Sella valley, inviting the traveller to adventure himself for Sahagun; and the view frames itself delightfully into the great arch of the bridge. It was obviously impossible to do it justice on a

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CÁNGAS DE ONIS

The Bridge over the Sella.

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sketching block, and exceedingly probable that one would get sunstroke in the attempt; but there was no deferring to the promptings of prudence, and the clouds charitably came to my rescue before I was quite melted away. The natives at first watched me in horror from a distance; but they crowded in around me as soon as the sun retired, and began to volunteer information concerning the annals of the dale. "One morning in '85," said an old peasant, tapping the roadway impressively with his cudgel, "the water was over here!" *Car-r-ramba*, my brother! But that must have been an anxious day for Cángas de Onis! A twenty-five-foot spate must have wrought pretty havoc in the valley! It was no mere vaulting ambition that induced the old architects to build their bridge so high!

Covadonga itself lies at the head of a little lateral valley some seven miles above Cángas de Onis. The spot is a veritable *cul-de-sac*. The steep wooded slopes are battlemented with a fringe of *aiguilles*, and over their tops one catches an occasional glimpse of the pathless Pikes beyond, their steel-grey summits streaked with wreaths of snow. A huge semi-detached rock stands out boldly in the centre of this natural auditorium,

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and the valley curling around its foot finishes in a hook against the isthmus which connects it to the hillside. Upon its summit is the Church of Our Lady of Covadonga, with its attendant buildings, and behind it, at the end of the hook, is a broad beetling precipice, coving itself out over its own base—the famous "Cave," sacred for ever in the legendary annals of Spain.

Here it was that Pelayo and his dauntless 300 made their stand against the 300,000 who had been sent against them by the Moor; and sallying out smote them with very great slaughter, in so much that 126,000 were left dead upon the field and about half as many more killed in the course of the pursuit! Truly we deal with gorgeous round figures in these early battles against the infidel! But why should the Spanish chroniclers have modestly stopped short at 188,000? A full quarter of a million is their standard casualty list.

It is a pity that the legend should have got so fantastically attired in buckram, for the facts upon which it is founded are indubitably historical, and, stripped of extravagances, they reveal a gallant episode enough.

The Moorish invasion of the Peninsula seemed

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at the moment invincible, and the first rush of conquest had carried them even to Gijon. But the northern provinces were as yet rather overrun than subjugated; and many bands of broken men had taken refuge in the mountains, where they were carrying on a *guerilla* warfare according to the immemorial habit of Spain. One of the most formidable of these bands was captained by Pelayo, whose stronghold was the rock of Covadonga, an ideal natural citadel for a bandit chief. Him it was resolved to suppress; and a "punitive column"—shall we say ten thousand strong?—was despatched from Gijon under command of Alxaman for that purpose. What force Pelayo had at his disposal it is impossible to guess; certainly more than three hundred, yet far too few to admit of encountering his foe in the open field. Cornered at last with his back to the wall at the head of the Covadonga valley, he drew his followers together into his rocky eyrie and prepared to fight to the death. The nucleus of his force would no doubt have been posted upon the rock itself and the neck by which it is approached; others would be scattered along the hillside, lest the foe should endeavour to crown the heights and deliver the attack from above. This last, indeed, was the only move to be dreaded.

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Against a *coup de main* the position was practically impregnable. Yet the attempt was made. Some of the Moors would perhaps have pushed straight ahead to storm the neck from the valley; but the main column circled around the base of the rock to take the position in reverse. It was upon these that the great destruction fell. Their ranks were disordered by the steep and broken ground, their flanks exposed to the great rock batteries which the Asturians had prepared upon the slopes above, and a well-timed sally by the party in ambush in the cave completed their discomfiture. From such a rout there was no possibility of rally. The whole army, deeply committed in the intricate recesses of the mountains, was overwhelmed in irremediable disaster; and on the little *Campo del Rey* at the foot of the crag, all cumbered with the bodies of the infidels, the enthusiastic victors saluted their chieftain with the title of King.

The victory was indeed even more decisive than its magnitude appeared to warrant. The destruction of Alxaman rendered it impossible for Munuza to maintain himself at Gijon, and the forces of Pelayo, rapidly increasing with the prestige of success, overwhelmed his army also in the Pass of Pajáres as he was attempting to regain Leon. The

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Moors made no further attempt to establish themselves beyond the mountains. Their Emirs were intent upon the invasion of Aquitania; and the civil wars which succeeded their great defeat at Tours allowed ample time for the consolidation of the infant kingdom of Asturias, until it finally grew strong enough to cope with them upon equal terms.

Covadonga has always been sacred to Asturians, but of late some attempt has been made to excite a more national cult. The new memorial church is one symptom of this ambition, but it is to be hoped the design will never develop sufficiently to mar the quiet retirement of this solitary glen. The church itself is a graceful little building enough, but contains nothing of antiquarian interest except the miraculous image before alluded to; and I regret to say that the feature which sticks most resolutely in my memory is an engraved bronze plate over the western door, of which the following is a literal translation:—"Out of respect for the House of God, and the Principles of Hygiene, you are requested not to enter in wooden shoes, nor to expectorate in this Sacred Edifice."

At Arriondas, a little below Cángas de Onis, the Sella receives a strong reinforcement from the

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Pilona; and thence to the sea it is a fine copious river—broad swift shallows alternating with deep calm pools in the very best salmon-stream style. It has the repute of being an excellent fishing river, as, indeed, its appearance would warrant. Yet I fear it gets but scurvily treated; for the local piscatorial methods cannot strictly be classified as "Sport." Once upon a time, saith tradition, there came a "little Englishman" to Arriondas, and sallied forth to inveigle the *truchas* with fragments of feather and wool. "And he caught some! Yes, he actually did! He even tried to induce us to do likewise. But we of Arriondas know better. We go angling with shot-guns and bombs."

It seems characteristic of Asturian rivers that they should keep persistently running into mountains instead of away from them, and the Sella below Arriondas is no exception to the rule. The stormy hills of the Sierra de Cuera throng tumultuously across its pathway and appear to prohibit all egress. But the river slips like an eel through the tangle, and its agile windings map out a passage for the road. No one looking downstream at the view which I sketched from the banks of it would imagine that the sea was within six miles of him and the river tidal up to his feet.

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THE SELLA VALLEY

Below Arrióndas.

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But at least those six miles through the glens are picturesque enough for a dozen; and they reach no unworthy conclusion when they finish at Rivadesella on the little hill-girt harbour where the Sella meets the sea.

All roads are charming in Cantabria: but where there are two to select from, it is generally best to bear inland in preference to following the coast. This is rather a cruel observation in connection with so pretty a ride as that from Rivadesella to Unquera; but nothing short of the Corniche road should pit itself against the route from Cángas to Abándames.

If the coast-line could be adequately seen, there might be more doubt about the verdict: for the bold black limestone cliffs which front the Biscay rollers would supply as fine a spectacle as anyone need desire. But it is only here and there that the road allows us a peep at some sandy beach ensconced between its jagged breakwaters, or some more distant prospect of cliff and headland where the coast trends forward beyond the general line. For the greater part of the way the view is entirely one-sided—the high, steep slopes of the Sierra de Cuera, and the idyllic villages nestling in the meadows at their feet. How Goldsmith would

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have rejoiced in this series of sweet Auburns, with their rustic shrines and *Pergolas*, their skittle-alleys, and their little *Alamedas*![1] How he would have loved to haunt the road at eventide where the village athletes scatter the ninepins with their great wooden discus, and the maidens dance together under the shadow of the trees! The Corydon and Phyllis of the Eclogues still survive in these odd corners of the globe.

The little town of Llanes cannot boast nearly so good a harbour as that of Rivadesella. It is but a creek in the coast-line through which a mountain burn makes its exit to the sea. The town is, however, larger and busier, and full of quaint balconied houses overhanging the harbour and the stream. Half a dozen fishing boats were unloading their catch upon the quay in the evening. Some rigged with short masts and long cross yards carrying square sails; others with two tall spars carrying lateen sails. The latter are the larger in size and more picturesque in appearance, but both types are common along the whole Atlantic coast. They carry large crews, and beside their sails they have sweeps for use in calm weather. When these are being worked the

[1] A public promenade, thickly planted with trees.

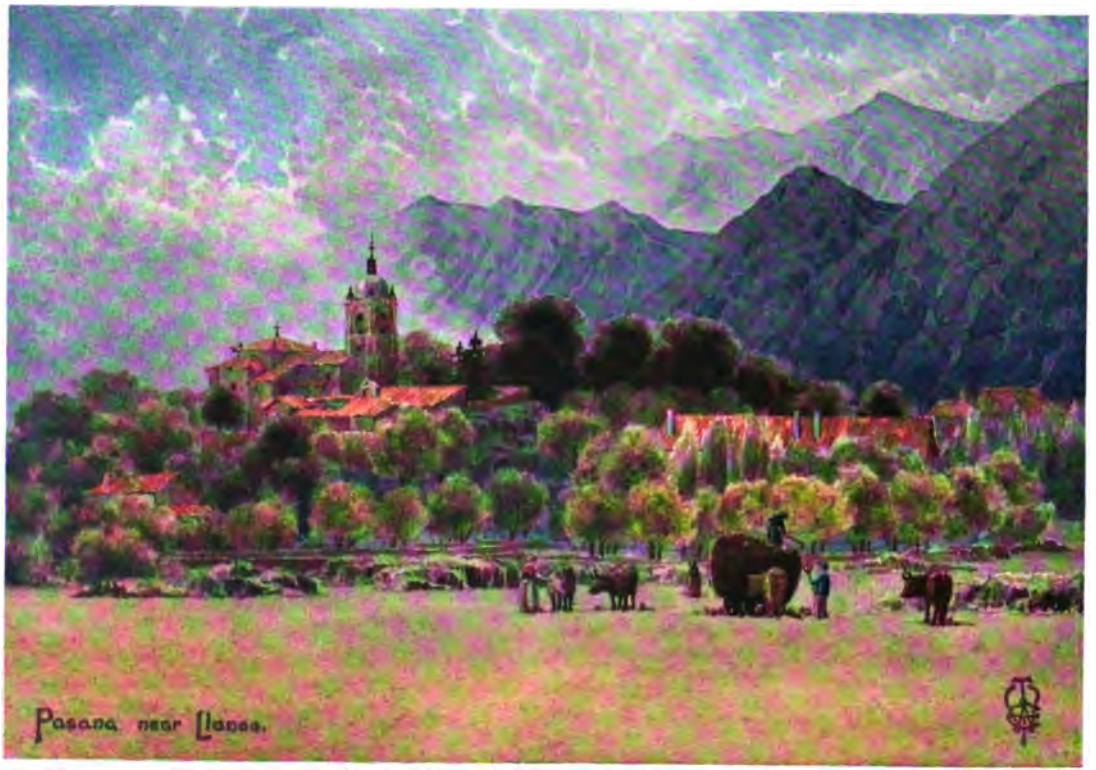
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PASANA

An Asturian Mountain Village.

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spars are lowered into a crutch above the heads of the crew.

Their catch consisted principally of the ubiquitous hake which forms such a persistent feature in Spanish bills of fare; but there were also a few squid, which at first I regarded as wastage, but which proved to have practical value in the *Fonda* at *Comida* time. They were served up complete, beak and all, with their tentacles drawn up inside themselves, and looking exactly like boiled parsnips. I tackled one on principle, having a well-broken palate, and being ambitious to do in Rome as the Romans: but it tasted of nothing in particular so far as I was able to make out. They are better stewed, however; and in this guise a gastronomical companion has pronounced them rather a delicacy; so perhaps they are yet destined to obtain recognition at Prince's and the *Maison Chevet*.

There is a mail-coach which works the road between Llanes and San Vicente de la Barquera—one of those miraculous rattle-traps wherein no sane person would dream of risking his neck if he were at home. They ply in all districts whither the railway has not yet penetrated; but an extensive nodding acquaintance among the tribe has introduced me to few crazier specimens than this.

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The fact that its hind wheels are considerably larger than the front gives a vague resemblance to a kangaroo; and as it whoops along bounding and lurching behind its five disjointed mules, it always seems just on the point of resolving into its ultimate sparables like the deacon's one-horse shay. At our first meeting I watched it out of sight with some anxiety; but it was still holding together three years later, and so, no doubt, it is doing still. Nevertheless its days are numbered. A light railway is being constructed along the coast to link up the two dead ends at Cabezon and Arriondas, and soon the visitor to the Picos will be able to reach Unquera by train.

This last stage has completed our circle and brought us again to the Deva. Our late-travelled road to Abándames turns off from the end of the wooden bridge, and again guides us through the gorges into the secluded vale of Liebana, sheltering behind its Alpine shield. At nightfall we crept into Potes like a couple of mice from the mountains, and baited at the little balconied *Fonda*, the first stage on the road to the south.

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LLÁNES

The Harbour.

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CHAPTER III

ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS TO LEON

We had penetrated the loftiest mountains in Cantabria without any ascent worth mentioning. Consequently it was somewhat disconcerting to discover that the Pass was still to win.

This preliminary canter had merely admitted us into a great cup, the bed of an ancient lake. We had entered it through the outlet, but must leave it over the lip. Within its mountain pale the whole internal area of Castile and Leon consists of a lofty tableland, two thousand feet and upwards above the coast line. It is vain to sue entry on the level: there can be no dispensation from the climb.

Potes itself lies just above the mouth of the great Gorge, and the precipices of the Picos dominate it as the Wetterhorn dominates Grindelwald. The deep, narrow vale of Liebana comes winding down upon it from the southward, its slopes gay with mountain flowers, and shaggy

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with beech and chestnut, and dotted here and there with quaint little red-roofed villages overhanging the brawling stream. But ever across the exit the great rock wall frowns gloomy and impassive, its base in the warm green valley and its battlements in the snow.

We in our sanguine ignorance had fancied ourselves upon the watershed, and thought that some two hours' collar-work would have earned us a spell of downhill. But the mountains were still thronging round us at the village of Valdeprado; and an old neat-herd, driving his cows to the pastures, unfeelingly assured us that the pass was two leagues[1] further on. We tried to hope that he was mistaken; but the Castilian peasant knows his roads well, and is annoyingly accurate in his estimates of distance. It is seldom indeed that he errs on the merciful side. Now the road began to ascend in real earnest, climbing coil on coil up the shoulders of the mountain, and marking its course far ahead at yet loftier altitudes by faint zigzags traced among the trees. A couple of easy-going ox-waggons had lost heart at the very first corner. Their drivers and cattle were all placidly slumbering, and the whole caravan had stuck fast in the

[1] A Spanish league is about an hour's march, say 3¾ miles.

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middle of the road. It seemed a pity to disturb so much unanimity; and quite an hour later, looking down from the loftier terraces, we could still distinguish their figures in the same position as before. At last we emerged upon a bare and rocky saddle, just brushed by the drifting clouds—a pass by courtesy, for it was almost as high as the peaks, and the snow-wreaths lay unmelted in the shady spots by the road. A great craggy postern shot us out from the ridge into the head of an upland valley; and beneath hotter skies, through a more sunburnt country, we sped towards the plateau of Castile.

The descent on the southern side of the *Puerto* is nothing like so formidable as upon the northern; and the mountains, shorn of half their elevation by the altitude to which we have risen, look much less imposing than on the seaward side. They eventually come to an end with startling suddenness a mile or so beyond the village of Cervera; and from their feet to the southward the great treeless level sweeps away unbroken—an almost uncanny contrast to the tossing wilderness behind.

We had counted upon finding a road of some kind towards Leon from Cervera, but the inhabitants evidently needed none and declined to encourage

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the idea. A railroad, yes;—the train would start at one o'clock to-morrow. But the only road went southward. If we followed that we might possibly find a way round. At all events it was a good road, sagging steadily down over the moors and marshes, shaded here and there by rustling poplar avenues, and musical with philharmonic frogs. It delivered us safely at nightfall in the little village of Buenavista, a collection of forlorn mud cabins, dumped disconsolately in the tawny plain.

The *Fondas* in the larger towns are generally very tolerable, and even the humbler hostels in Cantabria are presentable after their kind. But the little *Posadas* and *Paradors* of the villages in the interior are much more primitive institutions, and these are the lot of the traveller who ventures to take to the road. I should imagine that they have not changed one tittle since the day when Don Quixote, and the Curate, and the Barber, and the beautiful Dorothea, and the tattered Cardenio, foregathered with Don Ferdinand and Dona Lucinda at the *Venta de Cárdenas* in the Sierra Morena; and one wonders much how the whole of that illustrious company were able to find accommodation under its roof. Externally it suggests an abandoned cowshed, and the wayfarer

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introduced to one for the first time will apply for quarters with something bordering on despair. The gateway admits us into a barn-like entrance-hall, disordered and unpaved. One of the four rooms opening out of it is the stable, and the mules stroll sociably through the family circle in the course of their passage to and fro. Another is the kitchen, with the hearth in the middle of the floor,[1] and the ceiling funnelled to an aperture in the apex, through which the log-reek escapes as best it can. A third (the smallest) is the guest-room, and the fourth one would call a lumber-room, if any of the others could be called anything else. The bedrooms are mere attics, reached by a crazy staircase, and the chinks in the floor communicate freely with the rooms (or stables) below. The furniture is of the scantiest, and the food of Spartan simplicity; and the family poultry cackle about between our legs picking up the crumbs which fall from the table. But at least the dishes are clean and the sheets obviously washed this very evening; and a wayworn philosopher can brook a good number of hardships so long

[1] At one place it consisted of a huge earthenware bowl, 3 feet high and 4 feet in diameter, filled up solid with earth to within 4 inches of the rim.

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as he is not compelled to wear them next his skin.

The villagers were dancing before the door at the moment of our arrival, but the ball was at once interrupted to interview such extraordinary guests. "They came round about us like bees," wrote poor Sir E. Verney in 1628, "touching one thing and handling another, and did not leave us till we were abed!" Of course they did! But Sir Edmund was a little particular; and we suspect old James Howell had some reason for his strictures anent the stand-offishness of the members of Prince Charles' suite. Our catechising was conducted by the hostess and her daughter: What were our names? Whence were we? Whither did we go? They surveyed the bicycles with gasps of "*Madre mia!*" and I am sure their fingers itched to explore the inside of our packs. Were we married? No? The English married very little! And this depressing reflection cost them a sad little shake of the head. It grew rather wearying at last, but discourtesy was nowise intended. A stranger in these forgotten villages is as rare as a blue moon.

Spain is socially the most democratic of countries; but it is an aristocratic democracy; and

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we must not forget that fact because our interlocutor happens to be wearing rags. He and his may have been as poor as church mice for generations;—that is his misfortune. But he is as good a gentleman as the king, and, as like as not, fully entitled to all the proud quarterings that are graven up over his door. "I'm an old Christian," quoth that powerful thinker, the Governor designate of Barataria, "a high and dry old Christian, and that's good enough for a lord." The Castilian peasant regards you as an equal, and expects to be so treated in return: and I have no doubt that a modern Sancho, if he found himself in the society of a duchess, would be fully as unembarrassed as the great original himself. In many points—even in physiognomical features—he has much in common with that other "foinest pisantry" the Irish; and it is worth noting that the original Milesians are traditionally reputed to have come from Spain.

Individually he is "a very fine fellow." The verdict is the Duke of Wellington's. And probably no one in history knew their failings better than he. Spain is no "dying nationality," though her day be still rather "*Mañana*." It is idle to deny a future to so robust and prolific a race.

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The traveller need not look to fare sumptuously in a *Posada*. If he does not carry his own food with him he must take what comes. Mine host does not profess to find accommodation for man, only for beast; and anything he does for the beast's owner is regarded as a work of supererogation. We cannot lodge with the peasantry without sharing some few of their holiday hardships; and there can be no doubt that in many districts they are miserably poor. "There is no milk in the place," said mine hostess to me on one occasion, in answer to a request for that commonest of luxuries;—"this village is in *la ultima miseria*!" Yet even there they seemed cheerful and contented; and the common taunt of idleness certainly did not apply to them. Spanish townsfolk are by no means early risers; but the villages are stirring at cock-crow and the labourers out in the fields with the first rays of the sun.

This last is no inconsiderable advantage in a country which gets hot by eight o'clock in the morning; and the great red disk was but half clear of the horizon when we bade farewell to Buenavista, and began our long ride to Leon. Washing arrangements had no share in our *Posada's* economy, so this mysterious British ritual was cele-

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LEON

An Old Palace Doorway.

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brated at Saldaña, on the banks of the Carrion; and being here favoured with a branch road which made a cast to the westward, we resumed our journey across the level in the direction of Sahagun.

Strictly speaking this is one of those levels which slope upwards and downwards a good deal; for the streams coming down from the mountains have cut themselves good deep valleys, though they seldom supply any water except on special occasions during the autumn rains. In the dips are trees and greenery, but the general impression is that of a bleak red ploughland interspersed with wide stretches of heath. Here and there, marooned at haphazard, are the casual villages, with their umber-coloured mud walls and red-tiled roofs, rich blotches of colour against the blue of the distant hills. And the desolate aspect of the country is enhanced by the dearth of inhabitants. There is scarcely a labourer in the fallows, scarcely a traveller on the road.

No! the little squared stones that we keep passing so regularly do not record the kilometres —only the ordinary roadside murders incidental to an ancient highway. Upon each is graven the simple fact of the tragedy:—*Aqui murio*,[1] with the

[1] Here died ——.

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name and date,—no more. They are generally said to have been erected as a trespass offering by the remorseful murderer: and their persistent recurrence cannot be said to make for gaiety;—a large group is even depressing at a specially desolate spot.

Of course we endeavour to solace ourselves with the reflection that there is at least one similar monument in England; and we note with gratification that very few are of recent date. But then that does not prove that the murders are now less frequent, only that the murderers have less remorse. Yet, after all, the traveller may take courage; his position is not quite desperate, however unpromising it may look. Many of these untimely deaths were the result of ordinary accidents—storm or sunstroke, falls from horses ("a grave that is always open"), or drowning in the flooded streams. Sometimes a private vendetta may have reached its *dénouement* in a chance roadside meeting; but genuine highway murders form a very small proportion of the whole. The roads in Spain are as safe as those in England. And though I have been warned that "there are men in this village who would not hesitate to cut your throat for a dollar," yet the country folk generally (as one of

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themselves bore me witness) are *gente muy regular*, "a very law-abiding folk." The only really reliable method of getting murdered upon a Spanish highway nowadays is to quarrel with the Arm of the Law!

See,—out of one of the dips in the road before us rise the figures of two horsemen;—big men, well mounted, in white puggarees and smart blue uniforms, with sabre at saddle and carbine on thigh; —the Civil Guard of Spain. *Vayan Vs con Dios, Caballeros!* Spain owes you a debt that is not to be readily computed. Those who have delivered her from her long tyranny of lawlessness deserve a niche beside the old knightly orders of Calatrava and Alcántara, who kept the border in the days of raiding Moors.

Don Bernardo de Castel Blazo distrusted those who kept company with *Alguazils*; but it is a highly desirable privilege to be friends with the Civil Guard. *En passant* it may be mentioned that it is imprudent to be otherwise, for they are authorised to shoot at sight, and are reputed seldom to miss. But this vexatious habit is one which they seldom indulge in, and so long as you keep the right side of them they are very good fellows indeed. Should our misguided rulers ever signalise their ineptitude

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by the disbandment of the Royal Irish Constabulary, we shall lose the one body in Europe which is altogether comparable to the *Guardia Civil.*

Readers of Borrow may perhaps recall his description of a forlorn and melancholy township halfway between Paléncia and Leon, a hotbed of Carlism, which he discreetly alludes to as ——. But it seems somewhat superfluous reticence to throw such a very thin veil of anonymity over a name which is obviously Sahagun. Once the great Romanesque Monastery, whose massive square tower forms such an imposing landmark, was first in wealth and dignity in all the kingdom of Leon. But now it is but the wreck of its former greatness; and the crazy mud hovels and hummocky streets which surround it form an abomination of dilapidation that it would not be easy to match even in Spain. What a fit scene for disillusion it must have presented to Moore and his army as they here turned their backs upon victory and commenced their disastrous retreat! The soldiers were all spoiling for a battle, and the 15th Hussars had brilliantly opened the scoring. But just as they savoured their appetiser they were dragged off, disappointed and morose. No wonder they sulked! How were they to know the true cause of their

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retirement? They were thinking only of Soult at Saldaña; it was their General who had been watching for the rush of Napoleon from Madrid.

There is still a Carlist at Sahagun, because we saw him. The inhabitants, recognising us as strangers, naturally assumed that we should be interested in seeing their Carlist, and he was accordingly fetched and paraded, much as a man who had been "out" in the '45 might have been shown to Dr Johnson in the Hebrides. He was a white-haired and mild-mannered old gentleman,—a greatly sobered edition of the dashing young *guerillero* who had ranged the mountains of Biscay in 1875. And though he evidently enjoyed his repute as a fire-eater, I doubt whether he really considered that the game had been quite worth the candle after all.

The Carlists of to-day seem much in the same position as the Jacobites of the reign of George III. They may defiantly show you "King Carlos'" portrait upon their parlour wall, or even exhibit it for sale in their shop windows. But all this enthusiasm is rather sentimental than active; and in their heart of hearts they must feel with Redgauntlet that a cause so much tolerated is lost.

Meanwhile the road to Leon did not seem nearer

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realisation at Sahagun than at Cervera. There was only a "dead road," they told us, and this we should scarcely have recognised had we not been introduced. The "dead road" proved a sort of consensus of cart tracks, straying vaguely across the moorland with a general trend towards the west. It had died in a most dissipated fashion all asprawl among the boulders and heather; and as each of us soon grew fully absorbed in negotiating his own wheel rut, we frequently found ourselves drifting poles asunder, and had to regain connection by cross-country sprints. The water-courses were ineffably stony, and, of course, there were no bridges. We had good cause to congratulate ourselves on the absence of rain in the mountains, for had the streams been in spate we should have had no resource but to follow the example of the expectant rustic, and wait for them to run down. The occasional walled sheepfolds, and the spiked collars of the dogs which guarded them, hinted broadly at the inroads of wolves in winter-time; and our only way-fellows, a party of gypsies, savage-looking and half-naked, with tangled elf locks and skins of negro blackness, formed a group that to outward appearance seemed scarcely more amenable than the wolves. Fortu-

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nately, however, there was small chance of missing our direction. We could not stray many miles to our right without coming upon the railway, nor to the left without striking the high-road from Mayorga. The one thing needed was to keep our right shoulders to the mountains; and eventually we emerged sure enough at Mansilla de las Mulas, where, after twenty miles cross-country, our wilderness came to an end.

Mansilla lies upon the banks of the Esla, and the mules were grazing under the ancient ramparts along the margin of the stream. A pretty picture it made as we crossed the old bridge in the twilight and entered the long colonnade of poplars that leads towards the city of Leon. The poplar pollen carpeted the road before us as thick and white as newly-fallen snow, and the whirl of our wheels flung it up on either side in little wavelets, as the foam is flung up by the bows of a racing eight. The effect was quite poetical, but we could not linger to rhapsodise, for the causeway had been broken by floods in several places, and unless we made use of the daylight we should be breaking our necks in the pits. It does not seem to occur to the authorities that there is any risk in delaying repairs for a year or so. And perhaps we have no

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right to grumble, for at least we got safe to our goal.

Leon is a city for which I have acquired a growing affection with each successive visit, a grave old Gothic capital, all filled with memories of the past. It was founded originally by the Romans to control the Cantabrian passes; and the massive walls which surround it still bear witness to the solidity of their work. Unfortunately they are much masked by the surrounding houses; but they are of most imposing dimensions, about twenty feet in thickness, and strengthened by huge *Cubos* or solid semicircular bastions, spaced at very frequent intervals, some two and a half diameters apart.

The city is best viewed from the Pajares road to the northward, but as it is situated on the level it does not show very conspicuously from without. Its most prominent object is the delightfully elegant cathedral; obviously French by inspiration, and of extraordinary lightness of construction, more like a lantern of stained glass than a monument of stone. It is step-sister to Beauvais and Amiens; and, on the whole, it need not fear comparison. But the Spanish builders were not quite at home in dealing with the unfamiliar style. One

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LEON

From the Pajáres Road.

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problem evidently routed them, and they have left it still crying for an answer. How on earth was it possible to reconcile the steep French gables with the low-pitched Spanish roof?

The cathedral has been recently restored (not before it was necessary, according to Street's description); but this difficult work has been admirably executed, though the newness of the stone still renders it rather conspicuous to the eye. The interior is gorgeous with carving and tapestry; and a word may be spared for the Gotho-Renaissance cloisters, and for the great western portals with the Last Judgment graven over the doors. Some of the details of the latter are not without suspicion of humour. A monarch, walking delicately like Agag towards the gates of Paradise, is remorselessly barred by St Peter, and directed to the opposite road. One blessed spirit has been set to play the organ — and another has been deputed to blow it! Truly "one star differeth from another star in glory"; but an eternity of organ-blowing must rank low in the scale of bliss!

Scarcely less famous than the cathedral is the Collegiate Church of St Isidore; not the shepherd saint of Madrid, but the Doctor of Spain who

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compiled the Mozarabic ritual;[1] the "second Daniel" of Pope Gregory the Great. It is a queer patchwork edifice, but mostly of the eleventh century. The tower forms a bastion in the city rampart; and the little *Panteon* Chapel beneath it is the burial-place of the early monarchs of Leon.

Here in 1065 occurred the strange death scene of the founder, the warrior monarch Fernando I. of Leon and Castile. Smitten with sore disease while camping on the marches of Valencia, he had been borne back to make his dying confession before the altar of his metropolitan church. There he laid aside his crown and robes, and clad his wasted limbs in sack-cloth, and for a full day and night lay writhing in ashes on the pavement till his self-inflicted penance was at last ended by his death. We are assured that his original sickness really had been mortal from the first.

Few capitals of Spain are without some memorial of Las Navas de Tolosa, the great victory won by Alfonso VIII. in 1212, which crippled the Spanish Moslems for offensive warfare, and paved the way for the conquest of Andalusia by Ferdinand III. Búrgos and Pamplona have the trophies of the

[1] See p. 140.

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LEON

Church of San Isidoro.

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fighting; but Leon has only a legend; and it is to *San Isidoro* and King Fernando that they are indebted for having anything at all. For it came to pass on the eve of the battle that a sound was heard at midnight in the streets of the slumbering city. A sound as of the passage of a mighty army, the clang of armour and the tramp of horse and man. The priest who was keeping vigil at the shrine of St Isidore heard the phantom host halt before the portal and their thundering summons beat upon the door. "Who knocks?" he cried; and the ghostly captains answered him, "Ferdinand Gonzalez and Roderic of Bivar![1] And we are come to call King Fernando the Great, who lies buried in this holy temple, that he may rise and ride with us to deliver Spain!" The terrified monk fell fainting on the pavement, and when he revived the door stood open. The last great recruit had joined the colours, and the spirit host had passed upon their way.

No doubt we may read in this legend the rebuke of the Church against the selfish policy of the Crown, for no soldier of Leon drew sword in that great battle for the deliverance of Christendom. Castile and Navarre and Aragon were the people

[1] See p. 140.

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that jeoparded their lives in the high places of the Morena. Nay, the Leonese monarch was even mean enough to seize the occasion for "rectifying his frontier" at the expense of his brother the Castilian. And this at a crisis when the very dead could rise from their graves and forget the feuds of their lifetime in the hour of national stress!

The main streets of the city are overshadowed by several fine *Solares*, the mansions of the old *hidalgos*, and, beside all its churches and monasteries, the town boasts an attractive Guildhall. But perhaps its most interesting feature is supplied by the crowd that frequents them; for Leon is the metropolis of a big agricultural population, a grave and stalwart race attired in the most picturesque old-world costumes. The dresses of the women are perhaps somewhat lacking in brightness; for they have a taste for sombre shades, especially a mauve-coloured head kerchief which does not accord nearly so well with their olive complexions as the brilliant scarlets and yellows of the girls in Galicia and the south. But this quakerish tinge in the individual does not produce much effect in the aggregate, and they look bright enough in the busy market beneath their forest of umbrella-

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LEON

The Market Place, and Casa del Ayuntamiento.

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shaped booths. They are reputed to "wear *Carambas* in their hair," but this we cannot corroborate. They kept them discreetly covered with the kerchief—perhaps from fear of the police. In any case it is to be hoped that the fashion will not spread indiscriminately. Imagine a German lady in a "*Donnerwetter*" *coiffure*!

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CHAPTER IV

THE PILGRIM ROAD

"He that is minded to go to *Santiago* may fare thither in many ways both by sea and land";—and to continue in Sir John Mandeville's vein we might add "by the heavens also," for our old friend the Galaxy—Milk Street as it has been irreverently nicknamed—masquerades in Spain as the "Santiago road." The Holy Apostle himself stranded at El Padron (after a rapid passage from Joppa in three days and in a stone coffin); and the pious pilgrims of our own land were wont for the most part to take ship to Coruña. But the main pilgrim stream poured along the old Roman road through Leon and Astorga and the Vierzo passes; and perhaps when the fame of the shrine was at its height there was no other spot in Europe which drew so great a throng.

Even to this day we may catch faint echoes of its ancient celebrity:—"Please to remember the

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grotto!" our school-children's August refrain. They do not know what they commemorate; but their date (by the Julian calendar) and their grotto and candle-ends and cockle-shells are all the prerogatives of St James.

As we thread the long poplar avenues which radiate from the gates of Leon, and climb from its fertile valley on to the bald bleak moors, we might almost persuade ourselves that the days of pilgrimage are not over even yet. The road is thronged for miles with a steady procession of country-folk, trooping into the early market in the old Gothic capital—as picturesque a medley as ever delighted the student of costume. Market-women stride-legged between their donkey's panniers, like Dulcinea del Toboso when she was enchanted; bronzed and tattered countrymen with the sun glinting on their shouldered scythes; long teams of mules jingling in gaudy trappings; and lumbering ox-carts with their prodigious loads of chaff. Here and there we met substantial yeomen well horsed and muffled, with their womenkind a-pillion; and sometimes a broad-breeched *Maragato* tramping along beside his loaded wain. The clear crisp light of the early morning revealed all the landscape in its brightest

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colours. To the southward the dun plain swe away unbroken till it is lost in illimitable tance; and the view to the northward is boun by the long blue line of the Cantabrian mounta peak beyond peak in endless range, like a str of chevrons on the horizon. No wonder Spaniards call their mountain chains *Sier* "saws."

The wide bed of the Orbigo river is cros by a long uneven bridge; the scene of the fam "Pass of Honour," dear to the heart of I Quixote and all the annalists of chivalry. In year of the great Jubilee at Santiago in 1439 I Suero Quinones, a valiant Leonese, made a v to maintain that bridge for thirty days against knights who refused to admit the pre-emin beauty of his lady-love. In token whereof an i collar was riveted round his neck, not to be moved till he had redeemed his vow. He wa knight of the military order of Santiago, hail from what is now the convent of San Marc But membership of the Spanish military orc was no impediment to love-making, or even

[1] This monastery is a very notable Leonese monument, a ma piece of *Plateresque*, somewhat similar to the *Otto Heinrichs B* Heidelberg, and formerly the property of the knights of Santi

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marriage (except in the case of widowers); so that Don Suero (a Paladin of his day, who was wont to fight Moors with his right arm bare like King Pentapolin of the Garamantas), was quite in order in paying these courtesies to the fair.

Now there were many knights going to Santiago for the Jubilee, and Don Suero and his nine companions enjoyed an extremely busy time. Seven hundred and thirty combats did they accomplish during those thirty days—a daily working average of two and a half apiece. Don Suero, however, duly got rid of his collar, to his eternal honour and glory; and seeing that even Philip the Prudent had his story republished as a perpetual example, perhaps it is not surprising that poor Don Quixote should have taken the pamphlet *au pied de la lettre.*

The bridge itself is long and narrow, with a pronounced kink in the middle, and if the tilts were actually run upon it, it is easy to understand the challenger's success. It needed but knowledge of the ground and a little judicious timing, and he could cut into his disordered opponent broadside as he rounded the bend. But doubtless this unworthy suggestion is a libel on the gallant Suero. His lists would have been fairly pitched in the open plain.

When we crossed the venerable arches they were

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in the state described by Mr Chucks as "precarious and not at all permanent." The ox-carts preferred fording the river. But perhaps this has been "mitigated" by now.

Another stage across the moorland brings us up under the massive ramparts of Astorga, standing "four square to all the winds that blow," as it stood in the days of that Cæsar Augustus whose name it now so barbarously mis-spells.[1] "It is absurd to speak of Astorga as a fortress," wrote the impatient Duke; "it is merely a walled town." And a walled town it is, most emphatically; but the "merely" seems rather inadequate, for the walls of Astorga are a trifle of twenty-two feet thick. They are sadly battered indeed, and mercilessly plundered of their facing stones; yet their huge rugged nakedness, scowling truculently across the plain from the crest of their natural *glacis*, makes them a far more impressive spectacle than their house-encumbered rivals at Lugo and Leon. They have at all events stood two artillery sieges; for the citizens held them for two months against Junot in 1810, and the French for three against Castaños in 1812; yet the old Roman mason who built them might readily acknowledge them still.

[1] Astorga = *Ast*urica *Augusta*.

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ASTORGA

From the South-east.

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My Santiago pilgrimage was not the first occasion of my visiting Astorga. I had called the previous year—and incidentally had left my heart there—but was not aware that my unobtrusive transit had sown any tender memories to sprout at my return. No sooner, however, had my nose inserted itself within the Fonda doorway than the señora swooped upon me out of the kitchen like a hospitable avalanche, and welcomed me back with as much fervour as if I had been a long-lost son. This pleasure at the sight of an old face is a very engaging feature in Spanish character. They are by no means forgetful to entertain strangers even at first sight; and often upon quitting a café I have found that my bill has been already paid by an unknown neighbour with whom I had exchanged a few commonplace remarks. Yet these earlier courtesies are formal; they are cordial to older acquaintances; and, like the Briton, they are reserved in their intimacies, and rather inclined to resent a too rapid advance.

One worthy old gentleman indeed, a frequenter of the café at Astorga, proved more insistently amiable even than mine hostess herself. He would no longer have me as a guest, but wished to sign me on as a townsman; there was no need for me

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to go further, I might stay and be naturalised out of hand. He could even supply me with a wife, and would warrant her "very beautiful!" Had Faustina been the guerdon, I doubt whether my constancy could have endured!

And Faustina: where meanwhile was Faustina? In vain had we come to Astorga if we might not have sight of its belle! I remembered her curled on the window settle, nursing her baby brother. Her raven tresses flooded her shoulders like a mantle, and her great dark eyes and Cupid's bow lips—the touchstones of Spanish beauty—were set off by the most piquant features and the clearest olive skin. Faustina was quite conscious of her attractions, and seemed by no means averse to challenging a little flirtation; but this time she was away "in the country," and the baby brother was as much aggrieved as ourselves. By now, belike, she is another's. Spanish maidens grow early to womanhood. Would that I could show future visitors how fair a sight they have missed!

The broad brown moors which environ the city tilt themselves up toward the westward till they culminate at the Pass of Manzanal. Their interest is principally due to their unique population, for they are the recognised Reserve of the *Maragatos*,

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that strange self-centred tribe who were long such a puzzle to ethnologists, but who now seem definitely identified as direct descendants of the original Berbers who came over with Tarik and Musa twelve hundred years ago. Astorga is regarded as their centre, but they are now more readily met with in the neighbouring villages; and the little hamlet of Combarros produced quite a respectable crowd. They are carriers by caste: and their burly, big-framed men, in their wide Zouave breeches and scarlet waistcoats and garters, had already become familiar to us even on the remoter roads. But this was the only place where we caught a glimpse of the women, who were attired in short orange skirts and scarlet cross-overs, with their hair drawn tight back from their foreheads and knit into trim little buns. They wore, too, some striking jewelry in the shape of large filigree earrings. But in point of physique the ladies were scarcely a match for their lords.

The ascent of the pass upon the eastern side is comparatively gentle, and its height not very much above the general level of the moors; but towards the west the ground breaks away more sharply, and the hillside is scored with deep rocky gulches, which are a source of great perplexity to the descend-

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ing road. It is a savage bit of country, and a fit scene for the thrilling adventure which is furnished to Gil Blas; for near Ponferrada was the cave of the redoubtable Captain Rolando, who interfered so masterfully with his intended scholastic career. Our hero was kidnapped at Cacabellos; he reached Astorga the night after his escape; and his distressed damsel, the unfortunate Doña Mencia, was waylaid upon this very road. The robbers must have found it a more profitable beat in those days than it would be at present, for then there was no road at Pajares, and even travellers from Oviedo had to come this way to the south.

The Vierzo basin into which we are now descending is one of the most interesting districts in the mountains of Northern Spain. It is a great natural saucer some twenty-five miles in diameter, considerably below the level of the plateau of Leon, and completely surrounded by a ring of mountain peaks. Geologically it is the bed of a primeval lake, long since emptied of its waters through the gorges of the Sil; and its many ancient monastic establishments, the primitive character of its peasantry, and the wild and picturesque scenery in the surrounding mountains, render it an admirable hunting-ground for the vagrant pleasure-

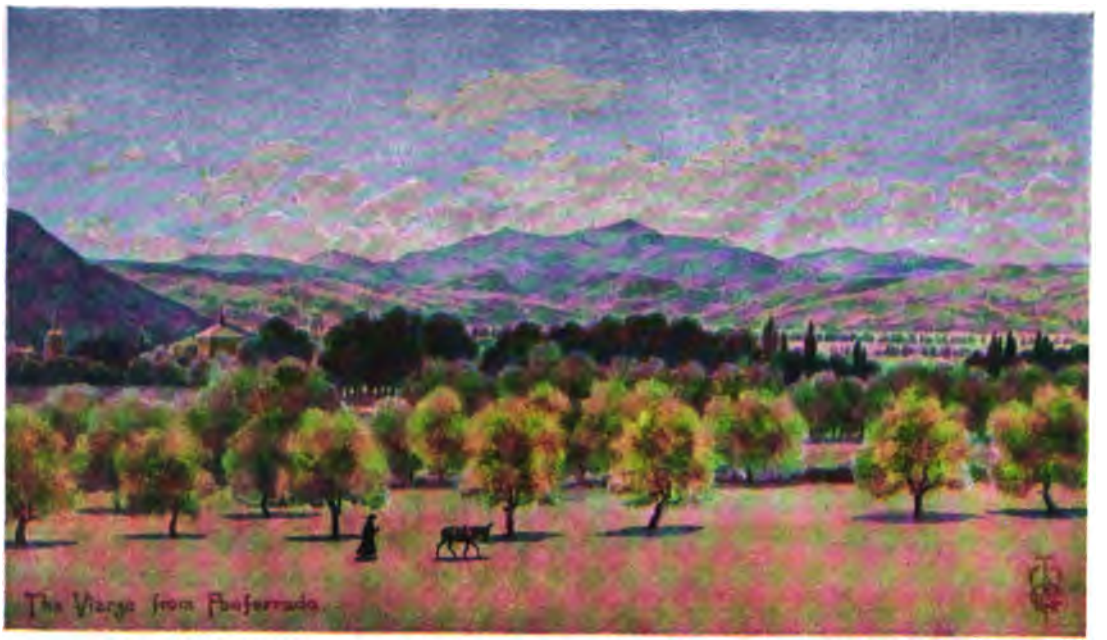
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THE VIERZO

From Ponferrada, looking towards the Pass of Piedrafita.

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seeker. Mere birds of passage like ourselves could see but a tithe of its attractions. It should be explored with a guide and a pack mule, a rod and a gun. And sportsmen need never complain of the lack of sufficient variety:—the Nimrod whom we encountered was combining "partridges and bears!" The hills are rugged and precipitous, the birthplace of unnumbered rivulets, their flanks flooded chin deep with oceans of white heather, and their feet hidden in primeval forests wellnigh impenetrable to man.

At our first view the country seemed hardly in holiday humour, for the sky was dark and lowering; and though the cloud effects were magnificent, the landscape beneath them looked eerie and morose. But, like all southern landscapes, it woke up wonderfully under the witchery of the sunshine, and donned its brightest colours next morning in honour of its patroness, Our Lady of the Oak-tree, whose festival was to be celebrated that day.

Ponferrada, the centre and capital of the district, is a picturesque little township, situated on a steep bank over the river Sil. Its most prominent feature is an imposing castle once a preceptory of the Knights Templar; but this was the evening

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of the Vigil, and the townfolk were all thronging into the portals of the church. The vast, gloomy interior was lit only by two or three tapers, which scarcely served to make darkness visible; and at first we could discern nothing but the white snoods of the women, who were kneeling in companies about the great aisleless nave. But presently the spring blind over the Altar went up with a sudden snap, and disclosed *Nuesta Señora de la Encina* herself, the little black wooden image which is the Palladium of the whole Vierzo, clad in white satin and tinsel, and set in a halo of incandescent lamps! This startling modern *finale* gave a queer jar to the old-world solemnity of the preliminaries; and the chant which burst out at the signal scarcely helped to restore the effect. The men's voices in Spain are frequently powerful and impressive; but here they were relying entirely on their trebles, who are always terribly shrill and grating, even to the least musical ear.

The great road which passes through Ponferrada on its way across the Vierzo has been the track followed by numberless armies from the days of Rome to our own; and to Englishmen it has a special interest as being the path of the ill-fated Moore. The second and more arduous stage of

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the famous retreat began at Astorga, where Napoleon abandoned the command of the French armies to Soult. Moore might very possibly have checked his pursuers on the great natural *glacis* of Manzanal; but it was the aim of his strategy to entangle them as deeply as possible in the Galician mountains, and he did not wish to make a stand too soon. Accordingly the English army, with Soult hot upon their track, swept swiftly through the Vierzo. They got abominably drunk in the wine-cellars at Bembibre and Ponferrada. They had a sharp brush with the enemy's cavalry at the hamlet of Cacabellos. Then at Villafranca they were swallowed again by the mountains, and headed for Lugo by the long and labyrinthine pass.

The road across the Pass of Piedrafita is a very different thing nowadays to what it was in the time of Moore; yet even now it would be no pleasant journey in January, with the snowdrifts blocking the narrow "prison vale." Gradually ascending the left bank of the river Valcarce, we passed through several picturesque but grimy villages romantically placed amid the rocky and wooded hills. The ascent became steeper and more tortuous as the road climbed up towards the saddle; and at last, on the very summit, we

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reached the "fixed stone" which is the boundary of Leon and Galicia, and entered the head of the Návia valley, which guided us down the long descent.

The western portal of the Pass a little above Nogales is guarded by a solitary watch-tower, perched upon the point of an isolated boulder in the centre of the V-shaped vale. This outlet, however, does not get us clear of the mountains; for another lofty ridge rises immediately beyond it, and it was at this point that some of the most terrible scenes occurred in the course of Moore's retreat. Hundreds lay dying of cold, hunger, and exhaustion; and the army treasure-chests, containing 150,000 dollars, were rolled down the hillside into the river gully, to save them from falling into the hands of the French. The closeness of the pursuit, however, was checked by Paget in a sharp action at the old Roman bridge of Constantino, which spans a rocky gorge half-way up the hill; and Moore was enabled to reach Lugo without much further loss.

We spent the night at the mountain village of Becerrea, high up near the summit of the ridge—a night of the most brilliant moonlight, which showed up the distant mountains almost as clearly

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as the day. Next morning, however, found the village buried in clouds; and through these we laboriously groped our way, with the trained fog-craft of Londoners, till at last we succeeded in rising above them, and emerging on the summit of the ridge. The scene was such as seldom falls to the lot of a cyclist, for the vapour choked all the valleys beneath us, and the mountain peaks that reared themselves out of it showed like so many islands in a sea of cotton-wool. The gorse and bracken around us were silver with the webs of the gossamer spiders, and the moisture that still hung to the tree-twigs sparkled like jewels in the rising sun. Before us a great pale mist-bow was outlined upon a paler curtain; and it cost us some regret to desert so striking a spectacle and plunge again into the cold cloud-bath that awaited us on the other side.

The series of parallel ridges which the road crosses upon its journey westward sink gradually lower and lower, till the environs of Lugo appear comparatively level. The valleys are green and well wooded with tall timber trees; and as the sun got the better of the clouds some hours before mid-day, we had good cause to remember them in a favourable light. Many of the wayside

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cottages were extremely pretty — irregular old stone shanties with shadowy eaves and balconies, and rude verandahs heavily draped with vines; and the distant prospect of plain and mountain forms a delightful background to the views.

Lugo stands upon one of the minor ridges which help to compose what Galicia calls a plain; and the river Miño, broad and placid like the Thames at Richmond, flows far beneath it in a deep, well-wooded vale. Like many of the Galician mountain townships, Lugo is roofed with rough, grey slating, and this fact at the first glance gives it a curiously un-Spanish air; yet there is no town in all the Peninsula more thoroughly national in tone.

The massive walls of the city are its greatest and most impressive feature. They are probably of genuine Roman workmanship, for they are built of square stones, instead of the random courses which were the fashion in mediæval days, and of such portentous thickness as only a Roman could conceive. At Astorga the walls are battered and incomplete; but at Lugo the facing is still practically intact; and one might drive a horse and trap round the top the full circuit of the town, without apprehending any particular difficulty if one met another horse and trap coming the other way.

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LUGO

The Santiago Gate.

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The cathedral is situated just inside the gate of Santiago. It is a thirteenth century building, but —like many other Galician churches—completely cased externally in late Renaissance days. Its three tall towers form a very conspicuous group from all quarters of the city; and it was a great grief of mind to my friends at the Santiago gateway that I had not included them all in my sketch. It was evidently a slight upon Lugo to insinuate that it had only one steeple. A Spaniard's idea of a "fine view" is invariably a panorama.

But the true charm of Lugo consists in its squares and fountains and the picturesque Gallego peasantry eddying in the narrow streets. The fountains in particular are a perpetual delight to an artist, and it is in the last hour before dusk in the evening that they may really be seen at their best. Then the entire feminine population of the city sally forth to obtain their water supply,—a kaleidoscopic medley of colour, and a babel of chattering tongues. An unfortunate *alguazil* is usually told off to keep order and preserve some kind of a *queue*. But no one thinks of taking the *alguazil* seriously except himself, for the girls are all in the highest spirits, and regard the whole function as a sort of glorified game of Tom

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Tiddler's ground, with the *alguazil* as a semi-official "he." The aim of every player is to slip in out of her turn. And directly she scores her first point, and the exasperated official rushes round to expel her, there is, of course, a gap left for number two. The sparkle and gaiety of the crowd is a standing reproach to us Northerners. It would be a very dour and drab-coloured assemblage if it had to be managed by us. Macaulay's artistic New Zealander will never make much of a picture out of the Hebes of Seven Dials filling their buckets in Trafalgar Square.

The pitchers which are seen at the fountains would require a monograph all to themselves, for the designs are always strictly local, and in no two districts are they ever fashioned alike. The big peg-top-shaped jars of red earthenware are peculiar to Lugo itself. Vigo prefers them white, and shapes them like an exaggerated teapot, with no lid and a very rudimentary spout; their rude resemblance to a hen—(any relation, I wonder, to the "tappit hen" of Scotland?)—is an idea which is often exploited by a potter of artistic mind. The black oval keg shown in the sketch of Rivadeo is monopolised by western Asturias; Pajares boasts an elegant three-handled speciality; and the

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LUGO

Fuente de San Vicente.

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pitchers at Caceres are of "Forty Thieves" design. The little wooden buckets are less susceptible of variety, yet even of these there are several kinds. The commonest type (much wider at the base than at the top) are hooped with three metal bands about two and a half inches wide. In Asturias these hoops become very broad indeed, leaving only about half an inch of wood showing between; they are kept brightly polished, and make a very handsome show on a cottage dresser, but must be rather heavy on the head. At Pamplona the hoops are equally wide, but there are only two of them; and at Pontevedra we saw a queer jug-shaped bucket which we never encountered elsewhere.

Next comes a great tribe of metal pitchers of various shapes and sizes, used by the inhabitants of Villafranca, Plaséncia, and Leon; and the very last ride I took on Spanish soil, in the neighbourhood of Santander, introduced me to a round-bellied, long-necked bottle of rough green glass, which opens a new vista of possibilities. Alas! that among all these delightful old vessels one should see so many outsiders in the shape of common cheap pails of galvanised and enamelled iron! One thinks with a shudder of the lean kine

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in the vision which eventually devoured all the rest.

The three tall towers of Santiago de Compostela salute the traveller from afar off across the wild moors that flank the Lugo road. The city is deceitfully situated—for when we are once within it we imagine ourselves on an eminence; but, viewed from without, it is undeniably in a hole. Yet there is no lack of impressiveness in this first view of "the city of our solemnities." The early pilgrim used to prostrate himself at the sight of it, and many would finish the last stage of the journey upon their knees. Such thoroughgoing devotion is probably very rare nowadays, but we would not like to assert that it is yet entirely extinct. For once in the little town of Briviesca, on the furthest confines of Castile, we did indeed come across a genuine pilgrim, with his "cockle hat" and rusty gabardine, his staff, his gourd, and his "sandal shoon," all quite complete. The retinue of urchins which followed him proved that he was not altogether a common spectacle; but in what other country than Spain could one look for such a survival at all? It is consoling to think that among his own people St James is not quite without due honour even yet.

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SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

From the Lugo Road.

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"Ballads are too old to lie," said Sancho Panza, and I love to think the same of legends. The mere fact that they have passed current for centuries should be a bar to further investigation of title; and a spot which has been held sacred by fifty generations of pilgrims does not need to be hall-marked by Dr Dryasdust. Nevertheless when a blind man is bent upon going into a dark room to look for a black cat, it is but charity to inform him that it isn't there, and the pedantically-minded may be glad to receive the assurance that the whole proof of Santiago's identity is entirely visionary.

It is related by a monkish chronicler of the English Abbey of St Alban, how one night in the fourteenth century it was revealed in a dream to one of the brethren that the relics of Saint Amphibalus were awaiting the quest of the faithful beneath a certain barrow on the Watling Street. Which barrow being reverently opened, there were discovered (sure enough) the bones of Amphibalus, and of sundry of his disciples, and the axe wherewith he was martyred, and various other articles of great interest and sanctity. Whereby it came to pass that some grim old neolithic chieftain, buried æons before amid his weapons and his wives, was

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piously installed as a tutelary in the Abbey Sanctuary. And much dumfoundered he must have been at it all, if he was present in spirit at the ceremony. "Oh, Bottom! how thou art translated!"

It was evidently something very similar that happened in the ninth century at Santiago de Compostela. But the Spanish chroniclers have been lacking in the Englishman's regard for circumstantial detail; so whether it was an untamed Cantabrian or a Roman Centurion who was annexed as *hero eponymus* for the basilica of Iria Flavia it is now impossible to guess. Be that as it may, the bones were certainly lost not long after they were beatified, and the authorities had to account for their disappearance by protesting that Archbishop Gelmirez had built them, for safety's sake, into the foundations of his great cathedral. This delightfully incontrovertible statement was the sole satisfaction provided for the medieval pilgrims. But we are now no longer permitted to build our faith upon such a stolid foundation. The relics were rediscovered little more than a generation ago.

This, however, is, of course, rank heresy. If any had ever doubted the genuineness of the original

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relics, their cavilling was speedily silenced by the direct interposition of Santiago himself. Sword in hand, upon his white horse, he rallied the Christian host at the crisis of the battle of Clavijo, mowing down the astonished Moslems ten thousand to a swathe. That day made his fortune for ever: but it was by no means his only exploit. Through many generations of warfare there was hardly a battle contested without his appearance in the ranks.

The warrior Saint, however, was not allowed to score all the tricks in the rubber; and one fancies that the hated infidel must have fairly wiped out the adverse balance on the day when Al Manzor, the great Vizier of Córdova, led his ever-victorious army across the Vierzo passes, and carried off the very bells from the steeple to adorn the *Ceca*[1] of Mahound. None had ventured to bar his progress, for the very name of "The Conqueror" spelt despair to the Christians of that day. The walls were unguarded, the city deserted,—man, woman, and child had escaped to the mountains lest they should be consumed. But as the Vizier spurred his charger through the cathedral portal, behold,

[1] Literally the "House of Purification," *i.e.* the Great Mosque of Córdova.

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before the tomb of the Apostle there knelt a solitary monk. "What dost thou here?" the Moor demanded. The monk raised his eyes to the terrible soldier whose face none else had dared to look upon. "I am praying," he answered. And for the sake of that one brave simple-minded man, the conqueror bade spare the shrine. Christian monarchs were not always equally scrupulous; for Gelmirez himself had to use his cathedral as a fortress; and Pedro the Cruel murdered Archbishop Suero on the very steps of the sanctuary—his motive being solely robbery, as usual with that royal ruffian.

The interior of the cathedral is disappointing. It is a large and imposing Romanesque building; but the furniture is tawdry and uninteresting when judged by a Spanish standard; and the colossal image of Santiago over the High Altar, though genuinely ancient, has rather a heathenish air.[1] Externally the structure is completely cased in late Spanish Renaissance or "*Churrigueresque*" work. This is not a beautiful type,—overloaded, *bizarre*,

[1] There is something of the same flavour about the inscription on the Gates of the *Hospital del Rey* at Burgos; "Blessed is the man that provideth for the sick and needy, St James (!) shall deliver him in the time of trouble."

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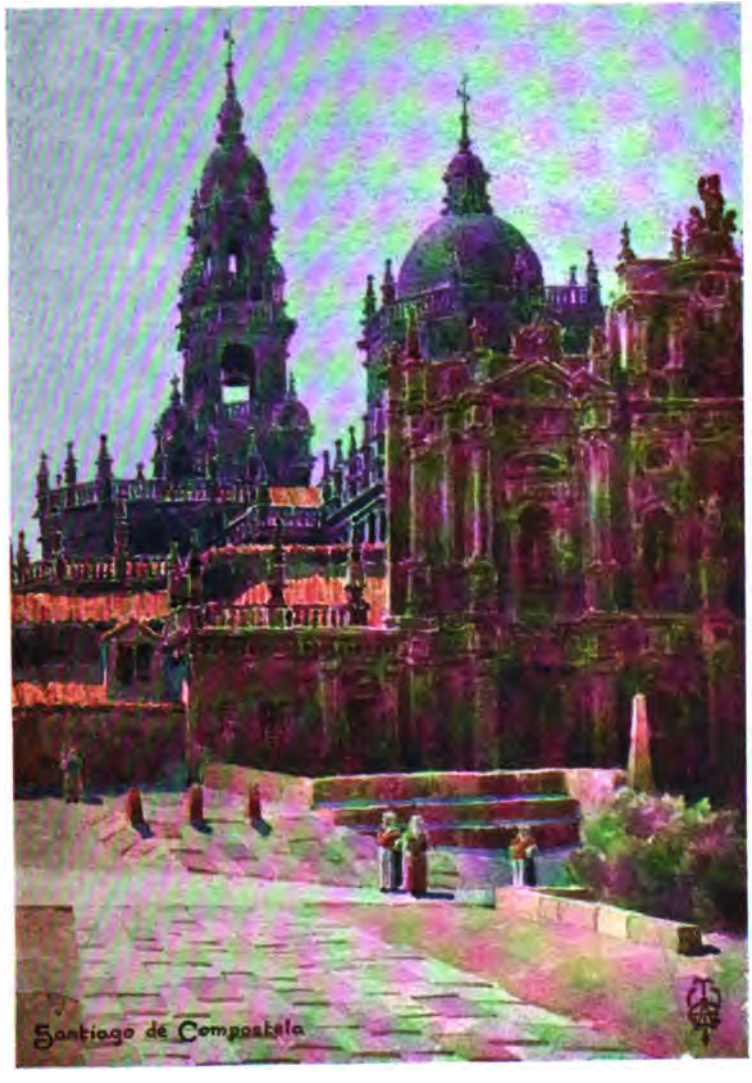
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SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA

The Cathedral from the North-east.

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and extravagant: but everything that can be said in its favour may be said of the cathedral of Santiago; and it must be a source of no little surprise to a purist that so poor a style can produce such a splendid result. The west front is indeed Churriguera's masterpiece; and a noble conception it is, had it but been erected elsewhere! But it is almost a blot at Compostela, for it hides the great Romanesque Portal "*de la Gloria*," which (as Ruskin might say) is the only really perfect thing of its kind in the world.

The cathedral is most admirably situated, for it forms the central mass to four great quadrangles which keep a clear space in front of it on each of the four façades. And colleges, hospitals, and palaces are grouped around the quadrangles, like a party of lordly vassals assembled to do honour to a king.

The streets of the city are narrow, paved with great slabs of granite; and in most cases arcaded, as protection against, not the sun, but the rain. For Santiago is notoriously the rainiest spot in the Peninsula, and is heartily bantered in consequence by all who are envious of its complaint. There is a tale told of a preaching friar who was making a round of the churches, and whose

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sermons upon the delights of Heaven drew large congregations in every country-side. Beneath the *nebulæ malusque Jupiter* of Santiago he discoursed upon warmth and sunshine, and won all the hearts of his hearers by the tale of such fabulous bliss. But he needed a different bait when he reached the far end of his circuit. The scene and the season were altered, and the unfortunate Franciscan, *sub curru nimium propinqui solis*, was sizzling on the fiery plains of Murcia. Like Horace, he was still faithful to his text, but his reading of it had altered, and his song was now all of a Heaven that was deliciously moist and cool! Our much-maligned English climate has at all events got compensations. Let a man have a surfeit of sunshine and he learns to think tenderly of the rain.

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CHAPTER V

THE CIRCUIT OF GALICIA

Lugo is the hub of Galicia. It lies at the mouth of the Pass of Piedrafita, on the great main road which enters the province from Leon; and which at this point trifurcates southward, westward, and northward to Orense, Santiago, and Coruña. Sir John Moore had reserved his option to the last, and up to this point his pursuers could not tell for certain whether he were bound for Coruña or Vigo. Here then he paused to re-form his straggling regiments, and boldly offered battle upon the eastern front of the town. But Soult was too cautious to fight till he had concentrated his whole army; and Moore having gained his two days' rest, made a last spurt for Coruña after nightfall on the second day. We shall come across his traces later, as we work our way around the northern coast; but first we would see something further of Galicia, and turn to chase the Miño to the sea.

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There are many parts of Galicia in which the scenery has an English flavour, and the Miño valley at Lugo is one of the cases in point. The fields are green and well-wooded, fenced with rough stone walls or sometimes with slabs set edgewise. The hilltops, rounded and heathy, are plentifully studded with Celtic and Roman earthworks; and when we mount to their summits (an event which happens more frequently than is quite agreeable to the cyclist) it is only like straying from Dorset to Exmoor or the Yorkshire fells. The moist climate of Galicia gives the vegetation a chance that it does not obtain in the interior, and of which it avails itself enthusiastically. The trees in the village *alamedas* are planted so thickly that they would seem doomed to suffocation. Yet they flourish luxuriantly, plaiting their branches together till the foliage forms a thick matted blanket over the whole area; and beneath them is "darkness that may be felt," so dense and solid that one feels one might dig a way in.

Our first stage from Lugo brought us to Monforte—a real "strong mount," not unlike St Michael's, but standing in the centre of a great plain encircled by a ring of lofty hills. Thence we proceeded up a long, winding mountain roadway;

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through the vine-clad villages that covered the lower slopes, and over the bare wild moorland that rose above them to the crest of the ridge.

A big Celtic camp was planted commandingly upon the summit, and here we paused like mariners out of their bearings as we peered over into the valley which yawned for us on the further side. Surely this could not be the Miño! We had parted from it yesterday at Lugo—a domesticated and navigable-looking river, quite different from the uncivilised little torrent that we now saw far beneath us, tearing along the bottom of this V-shaped glen. The map was a little ambiguous, but it offered no plausible alternative; and when, after several very crooked miles, the road at last succeeded in curling itself down alongside, behold! it was the Miño, sure enough.

The Miño is undoubtedly the most beautiful of all the great rivers in Northern Spain, and the variety of its moods is, perhaps, its most attractive feature. Nothing could be wilder than the glen by which it forces the mountains, unless it be the sister-glen by which the Sil comes down to unite with it, brimming with the waters from the Vierzo springs. Yet from the confluence to Orense it flows through an Eden of fertility, its hilly banks

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festooned with vine and olive, and the meadows beneath them teeming with corn and maize. Then comes a sterner stretch amid the mountains along the Portuguese frontier—more majestic, yet scarcely less fertile,—till it emerges at last in the broad, rich valley of Tuy, and circling under its ramparts glides slowly onward to the sea.

Orense, the capital of the district, lies a little back from the river on the crest of a slight eminence, an offshoot of the neighbouring hills. Its fine old Romanesque cathedral would of itself be enough to dignify any town; but the great lion of Orense is its magnificent bridge. This mammoth structure was the work of the mediæval bishops, whose reverence for the memory of St Christopher did not entirely expend itself in frescoes on their cathedral walls. It is the greatest of all the gable bridges, and its main central span, one hundred and fifty feet from pier to pier, is the widest of any in Spain. Neither Martorell nor Toledo can quite equal it; but Almaraz is considered superior, and it has neither the dizzy height nor the stupendous bulk that might rank it as a rival to Alcántara.

The bridge of Orense was the pivot of the French operations when Soult led his power from Coruña to renew the subjugation of Portugal. His earlier

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ORENSE

The Bridge over the Miño.

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attempts to cross the Miño at Tuy were foiled by the flooded river, the bad watermanship of his landlubbers, and a little plucky opposition from the further shore. Orense gave him an opening, and the country was for a moment at his mercy. But the respite had been invaluable—he had now but a short time. Within two months his army was reeling back from Oporto, without hospital, baggage, or artillery, in a worse plight even than Moore's. He had wrestled his first fall with the great antagonist who was destined to beat him from the Douro to Toulouse.

And while he was clutching at Portugal, and Ney at western Asturias, Galicia had slipped from their fingers and the heather was aflame. The outlying garrisons were captured, the foragers waylaid and massacred, even the camps and columns incessantly sniped from the hills. One noted *guerrillero* assured Freire that he had personally superintended the drowning of seven hundred French in the waters of the Miño. Probably it is permissible to discount his arithmetic; but the ugly boast is a sufficient indication of the spirit in which the struggle was carried on.

The invaders were finally drawn away by Wellington's advance up the Tagus valley; but

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indeed their whole scheme of occupation had been foredoomed to failure from the first. "It is impossible for any army to hold Galicia," wrote Soult to his imperial taskmaster. The mountains and irreconcilables were too much for any force that could be spared.

The Galician methods of viniculture have at least the merit of elegance, and the Miño is still undisciplined by the stiff formal terraces of the Rhine. The vines are trained over light rustic *pergolas*, the horizontal sticks being fixed at a height of about six feet above the ground, so that there is just room for a man to walk beneath them. The whole area of the field is thus covered with a leafy awning, and in most instances the old stone cottages are half surrounded with verandahs constructed in similar style. These are certainly the prettiest vineyards with which we have yet made acquaintance, but they are seldom seen beyond the limits of Galicia. The vines of the Duero are ground vines, and the landscape gets very little profit out of them.

The local *vins ordinaires* of the Northern Provinces are generally somewhat similar to Burgundy, but their quality varies greatly in the different districts. Often they are really excellent,

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but sometimes exceedingly harsh and rough—attuned to the "hard stomachs of the reapers," and flavoured with the pitch which is used in dressing the pig skins in which they are stored. The most famous of all is Sancho's beloved Valdepeñas from the arid plains of La Mancha; but the Miño wines also are excellent, and our hostess had good reason for confidence when she produced "her own wine" so proudly at La Cañiza. Old James Howell refers very affectionately to the "gentle sort of white wine" which is grown at Ribadávia; and he might without any injustice have extended his approval to the red. At all events it was nobly thought of by Don Francisco de Toledo, commandant of the *Tertia* of the Miño, who sailed in the Spanish Armada, for he shipped an ample stock of it on board the *San Felipe*. Whereby it chanced that three hundred convivial Zeelanders were carried incontinently to the bottom as they were carousing in the battered derelict.

The truly accommodative traveller should drink, like the natives, *a trago*, out of the regulation glass teapot or time-honoured "leather bottle." These experts hold the vessel well above their heads, and squirt the thin jet of liquid straight into their open mouths. But the art needs a long apprenticeship,

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and is painfully hazardous to a novice. It should not be essayed before strangers, nor in any elaborate get-up.

We had hoped that our mountaineering experiences would cease for a while at Orense—that our road would consent to abide by the Miño, and accept its guidance to the sea. We had got no further than Ribadávia, however, before we found ourselves again going up to the heavens, and the little river-side towns between Ribadávia and Tuy are only to be approached by branch roads which drop upon them from above. The hillsides are clothed with pine woods, plentifully sugared with huge boulders as big as ordinary cottages; and if (as seems probable) these are indeed *blocs perchés*, the ancient glaciers of Galicia must have been of respectable size. All over the lower slopes they are scattered in lavish profusion, and the topmost are gingerly balanced on the very summits of the *arrêtes*.

The clouds were massing ominously upon the heights above us as we rose clear of the pine woods, and our further impressions of the landscape were merged in the universal deluge that swallowed us when we reached the top. But the little mountain village of La Cañiza rescued us, and fed us and dried us, and made itself agreeable to us next morning

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TUY AND VALENCIA

The Frontier Towns on the Miño.

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ere it set us again on our way. La Cañiza was preparing a *Fiesta*; and a fact that excited our interest was that fresh figs were selling in the market at sixteen a penny — or indeed over twenty a penny, with allowance for the rate of exchange. We hope they were favoured with fine weather, but the outlook was not altogether assuring; and we were glad when we found ourselves across the *Puerto* and dropping once more into the summer-like climate of the deep rich vale beyond.

Tuy is the frontier town of the Miño, and the Portuguese fortress of Valencia confronts it across the river like some "deadly opposite" in an interrupted duel. But its quaint old houses and cathedral do not now wear a very martial appearance; and as I was allowed to sketch uninterrupted under the very nose of a sentry, it would seem that the rival cities have agreed to differ without any unnecessary parade.

Vigo (to our surprise) proved quite unknown to all the inhabitants of Tuy. "Bigo" they knew; but they rejected any other designation. And that with a firmness which would be warmly approved at "Balladolid." The consonants *b* and *v* seem everywhere at odds for supremacy; and it rather

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adds to the perplexity of the stranger that they often get written as pronounced. "*Villar*," at the first glance, is not at all suggestive of "Billiards"; and "*Aqui se bende bino*" would be so much more comprehensible if it were "spelt with a we." "'*Vivere*' is the same as '*bibere*' to a Spaniard," laughs Martial; so the provincialism is at all events of respectable antiquity. Yet it is not countenanced in the Cloisters of Toledo, where the "Sir Oracle" of classical Castilian is reputed to hold his court. At the same time we must confess that when we visited those hallowed precincts we did not hear so much as a syllable of any language at all.

Vigo lies about twenty miles from Tuy, on the further side of a wall of pointed hills; and our first intimation of our approach to that famous seaport was a procession of barelegged fishwives with their big dripping baskets balanced upon their heads. Untrammelled by their burden, they came swinging down the road towards us at a good five miles an hour, the elderly and grizzled among them as upright and elastic as the girls. If ever the craze for pedestrianism should culminate in an international team race for ladies, the fishwives of Vigo would be a "very strong tip." Indeed, if we felt quite sure that they would not get disqualified

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for "lifting," we might even venture to pronounce them a "moral cert."

A Galician woman thinks nothing of a moderate-sized haystack as her ordinary walking head-dress; and any article she may carry, from an umbrella to a harmonium, is invariably poised upon her head. No doubt they considered us extremely foolish not to do the same with our knapsacks, for the theory of equilibrium comes as natural to them as their breath. Walking or sitting, standing or stooping, they never so much as raise a hand to steady their baskets or their pails. And the lifelong habit has certainly given them a most stately carriage. A duchess who is ambitious of walking worthy of her vocation could hardly do better than go into training with them.

The Spanish peasant girls may not be classically beautiful, but they are well-built, strong and active; a healthy-looking, open-air race. The chamber-maids of the hotel at Vigo seemed to spend the whole of their existence carrying buckets of water upstairs on their heads to the bedrooms. The hotel was five storeys high; and their labour was as the "Well of Ronda."[1] Yet these cheerful

[1] The fate most dreaded by the Spanish prisoners in the Moorish wars.

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Danaids were quite unconcerned about their task. Even the peerless Dulcinea del Toboso, it may be remembered (upon identification), proved capable of heaving the crowbar as well as the lustiest young fellow of the village, and her remarks to the reapers could be heard at a distance of half a league.

Nature has dowered Vigo with the most magnificent natural harbour in Europe; but Vigo is only a fishing port, "a place for the spreading of nets." The economist who chances to wander thither will weep his eyes out over neglected opportunities; but an artist may use his to better purpose. Seldom can he feast them upon a more delightful spectacle than that great landlocked mountain-girt firth, with its deep blue waters bosomed amid the luxuriant vegetation of the hills. My sketch was taken looking seaward from the extreme end of the inner harbour; where Admiral Rooke sank the "Silver Fleet" in 1702, and where many generations of treasure-seekers have since groped over the muddy bottom in their vain endeavours to recover the "pieces of eight." Beyond the bottle-necked entrance lies the outer harbour upon which the town is situated; and further still, out of sight in the extreme distance, the natural

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VIGO BAY

The Inner Harbour, looking out towards the Sea.

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breakwater of the Islas de Cies repels the ocean from the bay.

But in the town itself the most attractive feature is indubitably the fishing quarter. The throng of picturesque fishing craft elbowing each other in the crowded basin; the crazy old arcaded houses that ring the harbour round; the sailors staggering up the inclines with their baskets full of gleaming silver; the women sitting along the quay and deftly decapitating sardines with their thumbs. The mess, the noise, the crowd, the bustle, the glitter, form one of the most brilliant pictures that a painter could possibly conceive. And as for the smell, we do declare upon our veracity that it is distinctly perceptible at a distance of five miles.

There are many such *Rias* as Vigo along the coast to the northward; and the road rising sharply over the intervening ridges, finds in each successive valley a fresh garden of delight. The huge mountain groynes push themselves far out into the ocean; and their precipitous headlands, Vilano, Toriñana, and Finistierra, form the mighty spur stones of the sea-borne traffic to the south. Between them lie the gleaming estuaries, each a harbour fit for a navy, and the deep verdant valleys well watered by the streams from

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the hills. Perhaps there is no plant in the world which could not be induced to grow here with a little attention; for the range from palms to heather is a wide one, but they flourish as if to the country born. "It is the Paradise of Spain," exclaimed an enthusiastic Astorgan. And one can well imagine how such a picture would appeal to a native of the arid plateaus of Leon.

Yet Galicia has a plague of its own lest the angels should prefer it to heaven; for the Lord of that land is Beelzebub, and its children are fodder for his flies. On the dry, lofty plains of the interior these pests are less virulent than one might expect in a tropical country; but in Galicia even the ordinary house-fly thinks nothing of transfixing a worsted stocking, and our shanks were soon spotted like currant dumplings with the scars of their innumerable bites. The chief tormentors, however, are the horse-flies — the "clegs" of the Highlands of Scotland—a terror even to the thick-skinned mule and pony, and cordially anathematised by the Galician muleteer. Their only redeeming quality is a certain bull-dog tenacity, which is all in favour of the avenger; though death is no adequate penalty for such horribly venomous bites.

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The village granaries in this district are a very insistent feature. There is one in nearly every cottage garden—a little stone ark raised on six lofty legs. In Asturias they are much larger, built of wood and capped with a pyramidical roof. There no one could mistake them for anything but what they are; but here their shape, and their size, and the little stone crosses on their gables, are all so irresistibly suggestive of a sarcophagus, that at first we could not imagine that they had any other purpose to serve. The average Gallego's fancy seems to turn on thoughts of funerals. His peculiar local type of bullock-cart also was manifestly derived from a coffin on wheels.

At El Padron we turned inland past the local shrine of *Nuestra Señora de la Esclavitud.* (*Penal* servitude, I regret to say, for it was a noted sanctuary for criminals.) The west front is a modest imitation of that of Santiago Cathedral, and the niche under its great stairway enshrines a beautifully cool fountain, which we could recommend more confidently if it did not issue from the churchyard. At this point it was that Borrow left the main track on his weird journey to Corcuvion; but we pushed straight ahead

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for Santiago de Compostela; and once more threaded its arcaded *Ruas* in search of the Coruña road.

The coach that runs daily from Santiago to Coruña prides itself upon possessing the most numerous team of any vehicle in Spain. We were assured that sixteen mules were frequently requisitioned to drag it over the snowy hills in winter-time; but from our own personal observation (in August) we cannot vouch for more than ten. The passengers were just stowing themselves into it as we passed them. They had a ten hours' journey before them, and it promised to be a roasting day. Yet the "insides" were packed like sardines in a basket; and some brave spirits were even occupying the roof among the interstices of the baggage, where they were all corded down together under a general tarpaulin! We wondered what they would look like when they emerged from their travelling oven at the other end!

The road is rather homelike in character, remote alike from coast-line and mountain: and more than one stage of the journey might have been borrowed from Hindhead or Rake Hill. Yet we gleaned passing hints of our latitude from the picturesque figures of the husbandmen, with their mild little

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NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LA ESCLAVITUD

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cream-coloured oxen, their mattocks, and their primitive ploughs.

These last are of Adamite construction, made entirely of wood and so light that the long-suffering women can carry them upon their heads. Such was the pattern known to Hesiod and to Virgil. Such an one was Wamba using when the lords of the Visigoths came to summon their Cincinnatus to the throne of Toledo, and the haft blossomed in his hand in token that their tidings were true.

We have continued gradually rising for the greater part of our journey; but the ground breaks away suddenly and sharply a few miles short of the coast. The view from the crest is delightful. A wide expanse of green undulating woodland maps itself out beneath us at the foot of the deep descent; and beyond gleam the still blue waters of the ocean, and the little saucepan-shaped city of Coruña standing out boldly in the centre of its bay.

What a welcome sight it must have presented to Moore and his soldiers as they struggled over the Puerto Bello, a few miles along the ridge to the east! Barefoot, ragged, and hungry, and drenched by the pelting tempest, like Xenophon's harassed

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ten thousand, at last they were in sight of the sea. The long night march from Lugo had been the most trying and disastrous of any. Yet there was no slackness when they turned to bay; and near Betánzos even the stragglers proved that they retained sufficient cohesion to repulse a cavalry charge.

Dropping in long steep sweeps from the heathery heights to the woodland, the road gradually settles itself down beside the banks of the Mero river; and just as the streamlet widens into an estuary we dip across the mouth of a little lateral valley, where the village of Palávia nestles between two parallel hills. The bones of three thousand men lie buried along that little valley, and the trim villas and gay gardens of the Coruña suburbanites cover the ground where French and English fought out their desperate struggle a hundred years ago. The focus of the fighting, however, was not at Palávia, but higher up the valley towards our left, where the ground was more favourable to the assailants, and where the defenders had no river to protect their flank. Here Soult made his grand attack under the fire of his great battery; here Moore fell mortally wounded on the slopes above Elviña at the very moment when he felt assurance of success.

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Moore's grave is in the citadel of Coruña. An unpretentious monument, but now well kept, and the centre of a charming little walled garden. Like many another faithful servant of his country, he had been set to do impossibilities, and was vilified by the impatient stay-at-homes, because they could not grasp the measure of his success. They had sent out a gallant army; and it was restored to them hungry and naked, broken by cruel marches, and reeking from a stricken field. They had never before realised what war was, and they blamed their general for revealing it. Indeed, as even Condé admitted, the details are ugly in Spain.

Moore's famous victory was not the only one achieved by British arms in this neighbourhood. Over two centuries before, in the year after the Spanish Armada, Drake and Norreys landed an expeditionary force to chastise the port from which it had sailed. They captured and plundered the town, and upon the very margin of Moore's battle-field they stormed the bridge of El Burgo and defeated the Spanish militia who had assembled for its relief. Of these they slew "a thousand," while they lost but three of their own men. From which it may be inferred that Drake and Norreys

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had been reading the exploits of Santiago, and thought that a little local colour in their dispatches would serve as a guarantee of good faith.

We had intended to make but one stage of it from Coruña, and encompass the bay to Ferrol. But our plans were all blown to the winds when we spied the little town of Betánzos clustered together upon its conical hill in a loop of the Mendo river,—far too attractive a spectacle to be skipped with a casual call. It won our hearts at first sight, as we stooped to the vale from the uplands: and our affections were confirmed the moment we entered the gates. A delightful little township, with none of its lines parallel and none of its angles right angles; and a whole population of models grouping themselves in its ramshackle arcades.[1]

We had been commended to Betánzos by Valentina, the waitress at Santiago. Betánzos was Valentina's *pueblo*, and "a very gay place" (so said Valentina). Betánzos played up to its reputation by an improvised ball in the evening; and few set ballets in a theatre could provide so

[1] Borrow stigmatises Betánzos as a filthy and evil-smelling pest-house. But then his horse broke down there. So much depends upon the point of view!

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BETÁNZOS

A Colonnaded Calle.

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pretty a sight. The *Plaza* is paved with cobbles, which are disadvantageous for dancing. But the fountain which stands in the centre acts as hub to a multitude of smooth flagged pathways; and up and down these, in to the centre and out again, the couples swung unwearyingly in a great vibrating star. The electric lamps (oh yes! they have electric lamps in Betánzos) only partially illuminated the area; and the patches of light and shadow gave an additional variety to the effect.

The Galician peasant woman's costume is one of the prettiest in the Peninsula. As usual, it is very simple; a skirt and bodice, a kerchief tied over the head, and another crosswise over the shoulders. But the charm is in the colouring, and the Galician women wear the brightest of colours: brave reds and yellows for the kerchiefs, with something rather quieter for the skirt. They almost all go barefoot; a spendthrift use of commodities, but doubtless extremely convenient so long as the wear does not tell. The foot will grow coarsened in time; but the girls have not any misgivings,—and the beggar maid probably profited when she came before King Cophetua. It is rather humiliating to compare the square-toed natural foot with the narrow, artificially pointed

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article which has been evolved for us by our bootmakers. Verily we have small cause to laugh at the fashions of the Chinese!

The men wear loose "white" shirts with dark-coloured breeches and stockings, and a *cummerbund* wrapped round the loins. Sometimes there happens to be a waistcoat, or a cloak slung over the shoulder; and the costume is usually completed by a battered broad-brimmed hat.

"Capital stuff, this," cried Ferdinand the Catholic, with reference to the royal jerkin, "it has worn out three pairs of sleeves!" And his highness's predilection for patching still appeals to the lieges of to-day. So piously do they practise his precept that it is often difficult to determine whether any part of their garments was original; and they all appear (justly enough) to have clung to a working hypothesis that the matching of colours is hazardous, but there is always safety in contrast. The picturesqueness of the result, however, is as obvious as its economy. Perhaps some day an English Ferdinand will revive the example for us.

The beautiful bay of Coruña lay still within the curve of our advancing roadway, and every re-entering angle was filled with a gleaming creek. To our right rose rugged hills, plentifully be-

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THE MASMA VALLEY

Near Mondoñedo.

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sprinkled with farmsteads; and more than one rustic township punctuated the stages of the way. The last and most important of the inlets was the great bottle-necked lagoon of Ferrol; and the famous arsenal itself lay half concealed at the mouth of it, close under the guardian headlands that form the gateway to the bay.

Ferrol surrendered to Soult without a blow after Coruña, and the pusillanimity of its governor probably robbed it of a creditable success. With half the spirit of Gerona or Zaragoza it would have proved impregnable, in the light of subsequent events. The Galicians were taken unaware when Moore drew the war into their mountains, and were stunned before they were aroused. The season, too, was winter, when a *guerrilla* was almost impracticable. They showed a better spirit when their torpor was thawed in the spring.

From Ferrol the road heaved us aloft to the crest of the great moorland plateau where the Miño hoards its fountains, and from which we looked out westward and northward over an almost limitless length of coast-line, with the dark upland ridges running out between the creeks like the ribs of a fan. How high we had risen we scarcely realised till we came to descend again, and saw the

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long, deep, highland glen dropping visibly before us mile beyond mile. Yet when we reached the corner, the little cathedral town of Mondoñedo still lay far below us; for what show as mountains over the Masma valley are really only the edges of the moor. We eventually came down to the sea at the estuary of Foz a little before sunset; and just as the dusk was turning to darkness we ran into the narrow streets of Rivadeo, and the arms of the motherly old hostesses who rule the "Castilian Hotel."

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CHAPTER VI

WESTERN ASTURIAS

A BUXOM old lady who was occupying the shadow of a large umbrella in the centre of Rivadeo market-place greeted us volubly as we emerged from the *Fonda* door. "A good day to your honours! It seems then that they are upon a journey? Ah! without doubt they are going to Castropol. Yes, there is a road there, but it is a long way round the *Ria*. They will save an hour,—two hours,—by taking a boat!" Our honours, indeed, had already come to the same conclusion; neither were they altogether surprised when their friend's eloquence culminated in the announcement that she herself (thank God) was a Castropolitan, and her boat in waiting at the quay below. A small black-eyed damsel was hastily installed commandant of the big umbrella, and the old lady sallied forth to rout out her boatman and steer us down to the shore.

This spirited attempt to corner the entire

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passenger traffic was hotly resented by a partner in a rival firm; an unprincipled operator who endeavoured to gain control of the market by the most shameless rate-cutting. He would take us across for six *reals*! for five *reals*! for four!! He followed us down the street, waving his arms and gesticulating and pitching his voice a tone higher at every bid. But the old dame resolutely headed off all his attempts to get at her convoy; silenced his feebler abuse with broadsides of the bitterest sarcasm; and finally expressed her scorn for competition and equilibrium by a dance of derision executed upon the poop as the boat shoved off into the bay.

It was truly a lovely morning, and the view was worthy of the sunshine. Behind were the white walls and shiny slate roofs of Rivadeo scrambling one above the other up the steeply sloping cliff; before us Castropol rose from the water's edge in a pyramid of purple shadow,—for the sun was dead behind it,—and between the two lay the glassy *Ria*, a long narrow fiord, winding away inland, reach beyond reach, till it lost itself in the bosom of the hazy hills. Evidently the path before us was at least cast in pleasant places.

We had made bold to confide somewhat in

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RIVADEO

An Approach to the Harbour.

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fortune when we embarked on this stage of our campaign. The map gave no pledge of a road, and the guide-books were equally uncommitted. Borrow, indeed, had traversed the province, with his honest guide, Martin of Rivadeo; but Borrow made his journey on horseback, and his description did not lead one to infer that there was any opening for wheels. Yet our trust in the chapter of accidents brought a suitably generous reward.

Take the mountains of the Lake District, and double their height: plant them under an Italian sky behind a Cornish coast; add plenty of old broad-eaved, balconied houses, not unlike Swiss châlets, a primitive picturesque population clad in bright colours, and draught cattle, ploughs, waggons, pack mules, and other appointments *en suite*. Such a picture is fairly typical of the scenes that awaited us upon our way. Here the road dipped to carry us past the end of a rocky inlet, where the waves were breaking upon the chesil beach some fifty yards away. Here it rose again to disclose a panorama of sea and mountain, with the thin blue smoke of the charcoal burners' fires trailing lazily across the plateau or wreathing itself around the shoulders of the hills. To Borrow's eyes it had all seemed gloomy and desolate; but

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he had traversed it in the mists of a stormy autumn, and beneath the halcyon skies of summer it is a veritable fairyland.

The *Ria* at Návia is scarcely worthy of the name, for it is merely the mouth of a little tidal river, not a harbour for sea-going ships, like the firth of Rivadeo. Yet it is a beautiful valley, and the queerly-cropped poplars give a very *bizarre* effect to the view. A little further on is a more striking feature. A huge serrated ridge, known as the Sierra de Rañadoiro, flings itself out at right angles to the *cordillera*, and stands like a wall across the plateau which divides the mountains from the sea. Just before it reaches the coast it branches off into a number of smaller ridges, ravelling out like the strands of a cable; and the last group in the series are the seven *Bellotas*, which proved such formidable obstacles to Borrow and his guide.

There is no chance of "shirking the fences." Each ridge terminates in a bold and lofty headland, each valley in a rocky creek; and seventy years ago those deep narrow gorges must have been ugly places enough. But Borrow's stony bridle-path is now a fine broad roadway, his "miserable venta" is a comfortable inn; and he certainly would not

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THE NÁVIA VALLEY

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have troubled to push on to Muros had he found such good entertainment as did we.

Mine host was a stout and jovial yeoman with a loud voice and a hearty laugh. He sat very wide at the head of the table, and promised us that we should have our cutlets raw. "What! Were we not Englishmen? And should he set cooked meat before Englishmen? No, indeed; that perfectly comprehended itself. *Spaniards* ate cooked meat, but *Englishmen* devoured it raw." Of course (as a special concession) *we* might have them cooked—"*á la Española.*" But this without prejudice to the eternal verity that "*á la Inglesa*" was "raw." We struggled in vain to persuade him that we knew as much about England as he did. An Asturian dalesman is commonly reputed capable of driving a nail into a wall with his head. But so long as his principles were not controverted he certainly was excellent company for his guests. He regaled us with a capital white wine, "*Vino Castellano*" (I suppose from the Medina del Campo district, which is the only place where I know of white wine in Castile); he discoursed to us on the beauties of Právia and the excellence of Asturian cider; and sped us at parting with the assurance that there were very few hills on the road. But

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this last piece of information (as we subsequently discovered) was to be accepted in a strictly Asturian sense.

Luarca and Cudillero, the two little coast towns of the district, are twin brothers in situation, but moving in different sets. Luarca is aspiring to the dignity of a watering-place:—it must have quite a dozen visitors in the season even now. Cudillero is a fishing village pure and simple, and is content to leave vanities alone. Each town lies nestling in a deep narrow notch of the lofty coast-line, with its quaint shanties spilling themselves pell-mell down the precipitous escarpments in all shapes, sizes, and positions, like rubble shot out of a cart. The brawling waters of a little brook go tumbling down the middle; and the tiny creek at the bottom is lined with a sturdy array of quays and break-waters, where the fishing fleet can shelter itself from the tempests of the Bay. Perhaps of the two Luarca has the prettier harbour; but the unabashed raggedness and dilapidation of Cudillero, and the old-world simplicity of its people, will appeal more strongly to an artist's eye.

The main road drops in to call at Luarca, but it is quite unaware of the existence of Cudillero, and but for the directions of an auspicious waggoner

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we might have strayed past it altogether. A break-neck descent of a mile or so eventually brought us on to the roofs of some houses; and it presently transpired that the town was "underneath." Down we plunged into it by a ricketty corkscrew street, as steep as that at Clovelly; ducked under the weather-beaten old church which is plugged like a bung in the outlet; and eventually emerged at the waterside, where the fishwives were sitting in a long parti-coloured fringe along the edge of the quay, armed with their large flat baskets, and awaiting the return of the boats.

The *Fonda del Comércio* was a poky and primitive little hostelry, but they had plenty of fresh sardines; and his lot is not entirely pitiable who sups upon fresh sardines. We slept in tiny alcoves curtained off from our dining-room; and our last recollections were connected with parties of happy fishermen in the street without, singing rollicking ditties in honour of "*amor*."

I was down in the harbour early in the morning for the purpose of sketching, and so also were a goodly contingent of the townsfolk, intent on their morning dip. It is a libel on the Spanish nation to imagine that they do not wash. Perhaps it is true of the central plains,—poor people, they

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lack the water, but all along the coast they are much given to bathing. The women stroll unconcernedly down to the beach, armed with a huge towel and a sort of glorified sack which serves as a bathing costume. The huge towel, spread over their heads, envelopes them completely, and under cover of it they make their toilet. At Cudillero the beach where the boats were drawn up was reserved for the women, and the men bathed off the rocks a little distance away. But neither party made any pretence of privacy; and there is an air of primitive innocency about the whole proceeding which forbids all notion of offence.

Another primitive sight, though of a different character, was awaiting me as I re-entered the town. It was Sunday morning, and the early Mass was being celebrated in the church at the stairfoot of the roadway. The building was crowded even beyond its utmost capacity, for a long *queue* of kneeling worshippers had thrust itself out from the open door, like bees hanging from a hive when they are about to swarm. Whatever may be the case in the cities, it is certain that the peasantry are as devout as ever in their religious observances; and once or twice

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CUDILLERO

The Harbour.

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upon holy days we have found the highway itself absolutely blocked with a crowd of worshippers intent on their orisons before some wayside shrine.

We regained the high road above Cudillero by a long winding ascent; and leaving far below us on our left the beautiful estuary of Muros, bore up into the mountains for the secluded vale of Právia at the confluence of the Narcea and the Nalon. "Právia is better than Switzerland," our host at Bellotas had informed us, and we do not wish to deny it. But the comparison could only be made by one who had never seen Switzerland, for there is nothing in common between the two. Our own Lake District would supply a nearer parallel; but I know nothing quite like Právia except Právia itself; a meeting-place of many valleys with vistas of mountain scenery opening out on every side. Yet the heart of the range still holds remote and invisible. It is not till we have progressed some distance up the Nalon valley, and are drawing near to Oviedo, that we get acquainted with the higher peaks. Then, indeed, the scale becomes truly Alpine, and the valleys which lie across our path would not discredit Piedmont or Savoy.

Oviedo is not a town for which I have ever been able to acquire much enthusiasm. A traveller

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newly landed from France might find it delightfully Spanish, but to one who is fresh from the interior it has a flavour of underdone French. It lies amid beautiful scenery, but just out of sight of the best of it; and perhaps, as it is bent upon a career of commercial enterprise, this retirement is creditable to its taste. Yet its situation is by no means commonplace, its atmosphere not generally smoky, and its fine old palaces and narrow cobbled *calles* must be allowed to weigh something in the balance against its boulevards and tram-lines and plate-glass.

The cathedral is a fine building, though it hardly can rank with the finest; and it seems to be somewhat infected by the prevailing Frenchified air. Yet in sanctity it is pre-eminent; for it boasts the holiest relics in the Peninsula — all the miracle-working treasures which the kings of the Visigoths had hoarded in their temple at Toledo, and which the faithful bore away with them into the mountains when they fled from the invading Moors. Some splendid specimens of early jewellery may be seen among the caskets and monstrances; and the reredos behind the High Altar is quite in the best Spanish style.

The children seem afflicted with an uncontrollable mania for getting their pictures taken. Perhaps

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there is thought to be luck in it, for even their elders are not entirely exempt. This fact accounts for the presence of the venerable *Sereno* in the foreground of my drawing of the cathedral. He insisted on shaking hands with me for my kindness in putting him there, although I had conceived the obligation to be all on my side.

These quaint old watchmen are a sort of hall-mark of municipal respectability. No Spanish city "of any degree of *ton*" would think of dispensing with its *Serenos*. Indeed, in some instances the *Sereno* has survived where the city is now little more than a name. Fine picturesque old figures clad in cloaks and slouch hats, and armed with javelins and lanterns,—(the towns are all lighted by electricity, but that is a detail),—they give a deliciously old-world flavour to the deserted streets at night. It is questionable whether they would be much use in a row; for like our own late lamented "Charlies," they are often aged and infirm. But their pictorial effect is incomparable: and they are real good Samaritans to the belated reveller, for they carry the keys of all the street doors on their beat, so that the errant householder can always steal quietly to cover, after he has awakened half the parish in summoning "*Ser-êno-o!*"

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Light sleepers abominate the whole tribe; for they have powerful voices, and their melodious bellow, "Twelve o'clock, and all serene!"—(the refrain to which they owe their title)—is sure to arouse all the dogs that happen to have stopped barking since eleven. It sounds such gratuitous worry to make night hideous because the weather is fine.

But it seems quite a passion with Spaniards to know how the time is progressing—not from any regard of its monetary value, but merely from an altruistic and dilettante point of view. They adopt at least three bases of reckoning—the local time, the Madrid time, and the Western European (by which the trains do *not* start). All the clocks are at variance with all of them: and the whole system seems solely contrived for the bewilderment of the foreigner, for the *habitué* impartially ignores the lot.

The people of Oviedo,—and, indeed, all Asturians and Gallegans,—are esteemed an inferior race by your true Castilian. The prejudice is rather puzzling: for "the mountains" are the cradle of the oldest and bluest blood in Spain. But it is of very old standing; for even the Cid Campeador, when administering the oath to Alfonso VI. (who was suspected of complicity in King Sancho's

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OVIEDO

A Street near the Cathedral.

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murder[1]), could devise no more humiliating adjuration than "If you swear falsely, may you be slain by an Oviedan!"

Perhaps the early warriors who sallied forth to achieve the reconquest despised those who remained quietly behind in the mountains. And when in later days royalty and chivalry made their home in the south, the simpler northerners would come to be regarded as boors. Even to this day the Asturian peasant seems to lack something of the formality of the Castilian. He is less punctilious in enquiring "how you have passed the night" of a morning; less prompt with the regular roadside greeting, "May your honour go with God!" The slurring of these little niceties may possibly be sufficient to brand him as a "bounder"; and there is no stigma more hard to obliterate than this.

For all these courteous trifles are the *shibboleth* of high breeding to a Spaniard, and a terrible stumbling-block to the blunt-spoken Englishman, —so apt to give unwitting offence. The Spanish generals always waited on Wellington to ask how he had slept, even when they knew that he had watched all night in the trenches. If they omitted

[1] See page 142.

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the ceremony they feared he would deem himself slighted. "On the contrary," quoth Alava drily, "he will be very much obliged."

The Asturian monarchs had good reason for fixing their capital at Oviedo; for it guards the main gateway of their kingdom, the chief of the passes to the south. It lies not indeed at the actual mouth of the valley, but a little on one side of it. Our road has to struggle over a couple of thousand-foot ridges ere it can lay its course straight for its goal. These two preliminary mountains we resolved to put behind us in the evening, and keep a clear day for the Pass of Pajares itself.

Our overture was by no means a trifle. It was dark when we began the second descent, and the iron furnaces of Miéres glowed up out of the black profundity beneath us like little volcano craters anxious to win themselves fame. Miéres is a village of ironworkers, and rather shabby and grimy in consequence: yet we were glad to gain its shelter, for the sky had long been threatening, and the storm broke soon after our arrival—a true mountain tempest, with the rain roaring on the roof like a cataract, and incessant flashes of lightning illuminating the valley with the brightness of day.

Storm succeeded storm throughout the night,

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and the outlook next morning was far from promising. But we took our courage in both hands and started at the first break in the downpour. The valley was choked with mist, and the road in a state of unutterable slabbiness: yet our enterprise was soon rewarded, for the weather had done its worst in the darkness, and the sunshine brought the vapours steaming up out of the meadows and banished them with the clouds across the summits of the hills.

The symptoms of industrial activity do not extend far above Miéres, and Lena is but the quiet head village of a peaceful mountain glen. Lena is famous for the possession of the precious little eighth-century church of Sta Cristina, perhaps the most notable of the group for which the Oviedo district is renowned; and the scenery amid which it is situated is very similar to that of our own Welsh or Cumberland Highlands, though planned on a larger scale.

Hitherto the ascent has been gradual; but now the road takes to the side of the mountain, and heaves itself up from shoulder to shoulder in a vast skein of steadily rising zigzags; while the railway which has so far accompanied it wanders off by itself into remote lateral valleys, groping for an easy gradient

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to help it up its four-thousand-foot climb. Twenty miles by road from Lena, and over thirty by rail, the approach to the summit is long and arduous, though redeemed by most lovely views. We have a vivid recollection of the glass of water which was bestowed upon us by the woman in charge of the level crossing at the foot of the final ascent. She was a Navarrese woman, and the water was the most delicious in the world!

At the final pitch the railway takes to a tunnel; and the road scrambles alone to the saddle, rewarding its clients with the most magnificent panorama,—looking out over the abysmal valley to the wilderness of pike and fell on the westward, where the rigid outlines of the Peña Ubiña are seldom destitute of snow. A rock-climber might break his neck very satisfactorily among these savage crags. One great *aiguille* in particular seems to challenge him by its sheer inaccessibility—a rocky splinter torn apart from its parent precipice, like another Napes Needle, but probably a thousand feet high. When the Alps have become unbearably Roshervilled, perhaps these untrodden fastnesses may solace the *blasé* mountaineer.

The step which carries us across the Pass of Pajares is one of the most decisive of any we have

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yet taken. It spans the frontier of Leon and Asturias, the boundary of the realms of cloud and sun. The ridge parts not merely two provinces but two climates, and we seem to enter the tropics at a stride. Behind lies the green and flowery valley, and the heathery slopes half veiled in tender haze; before are the hot bare rocks, and the parched grass toasting itself under the stare of the sunshine; and though the Atlantic clouds bank thick upon the northward, it is only an occasional straggler who ventures across to the south.

The scenery is perhaps less attractive, but on the whole even more striking; for the rocks, as in all Spanish landscapes, take most daring and original forms. The most remarkable example is near the foot of the descent, just before arriving at the village of Pola de Gordon. Here the limestone strata have been tilted up absolutely vertical, hard layers alternating with soft, like the fat and lean in a piece of streaky bacon. The principal hard layer forms the precipitous face of a mountain, and stretches for a mile or more along the river, like a huge surcharged retaining wall. The complementary layers are at first buried in the mass behind; but presently the ridge dips to give passage to the river, and rises again beyond

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in a bold conical hill, so that all the layers become at once exposed. The soft strata at this point are entirely weathered away, and the hard remain, like huge parallel cock's-combs, rising as straight and steep as the parapets of a gigantic stairway. These razor-back limestone ridges are a very characteristic feature of Spanish mountain scenery; but nowhere else have I seen them quite so strongly marked as here.

We were not to escape from the Pass without one final downpour, but luckily it caught us within reach of shelter at Pola de Gordon. A black, oily cloud glued itself onto the mountain above the village, the windows of Heaven were opened, and the deluge fell. It only lasted some thirty minutes; but by that time the village was paddling, and all the bye-lanes had converted themselves into foaming torrents which had piled great dykes of shingle at intervals across the street. Yet all the while we had been able to see the sky clear and brilliant under the fringe of the storm-rack towards the southward; and three miles away, the road was dry and dusty, and even the river that ran beside it was unconscious of the coming flood.

We finally slipped from the valley at the village

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IN THE PASS OF PAJÁRES

Near Pola de Gordon.

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of La Robla, and mounted onto the bare, brown moorlands that slope towards the city of Leon. The mountains come to a halt behind us as abruptly as if they were toeing a line; and the vast level sweeping away from their feet to the southward is broken only by the deeply grooved valleys of the Esla's tributary streams. The effect is somewhat similar to the line of the Merionethshire mountains breaking down into the Morfa. But this remarkable emphasising of primary physical features is specially characteristic of the geology of Spain. Leon itself lies low beside the river, and only comes into view when we are close upon it; but the cathedral spires are just high enough to overtop the upland, and form a solitary landmark for several miles around.

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CHAPTER VII

BENAVENTE, ZAMORA, AND TORO

THE Esla valley runs down broad and level from Leon towards the south; a monotonous umber-coloured valley, very different from the wild glens whence its waters are derived. The road is straight and featureless, though its newly-planted acacia avenues give some promise of ultimate redemption; and the mud-built wayside villages have a forlorn and collapsible air.

Occasionally one lights upon a regular troglodyte settlement, a group of bee-hive cellars excavated in the hillside, with the chimneys struggling out among the sparse herbage which covers them. These caves have no windows, and are lit only through the open doors, yet they continued to be the homes of the peasantry till within comparatively recent days. Indeed, in some few instances they are still inhabited; but generally they are utilised only as storehouses and stables, while the popula-

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tion has migrated bodily into the more modern cottages which have sprung up to form the village at their side.

The Esla itself is the most interesting item in the scenery. It flows parallel with the road some two or three miles to the left, close under the crumbling yellow cliffs which overlook the vale. Its course is marked by trees and greenery, chiefly the inevitable poplar; and its thin line of verdure, shot with flashes of sparkling water, is a welcome relief to the dun and dusty plain. The riverside hamlets plastered upon the face of the cliffs are so weather-nibbled and irregular, and so exactly the colour of the grounding, that they might be taken for some weird growth of parasitic fungus; and the whole scene has a most convincingly Nilotic air.

A short distance from Benavente occurred one of the few mishaps which it was our lot to occasion. An old countryman was jogging sleepily along the road before us with a mule and a donkey, when the animals suddenly took fright at our approach. A Spaniard is commonly a good horseman—when he is riding a horse. But he does not think it worth while to ride a donkey, so he merely sits on it,—*sans* reins, *sans* stirrups, with both his legs on one side, and no more control over his mount than

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a sack of turnips. For a few strides our victim bounded wildly between his panniers like an animated shuttlecock; and then toppled over in ruin, while his beasts stampeded across the fields. We recaptured his fugitives for him, and purchased his broken eggs; but I fear that it somewhat soured our sympathy when we found him doing nothing but wring his hands and bewail his losses meanwhile. We could not help feeling that the "language" of an English teamster would have furnished a much more satisfactory solution of his woes.

Benavente stands upon a tongue of high ground between the Esla and Orbigo valleys. The extreme tip is occupied by the old castle of the Counts of Benavente, one of whom is immortalized by Velasquez in the Prado gallery, clad in suit of armour which seems capable of reflecting your face. But his once splendid palace is now a ruin,—plundered and burnt by the stragglers of Sir John Moore's army; and the poor old town itself, though it contains some interesting churches, has grown wofully battered and threadbare since its *seigneurs* were driven from their home.

Yet Benavente is not without honour among us Englishmen. Its name figures upon a clasp of the Peninsular medal, and upon the colours of the 10th

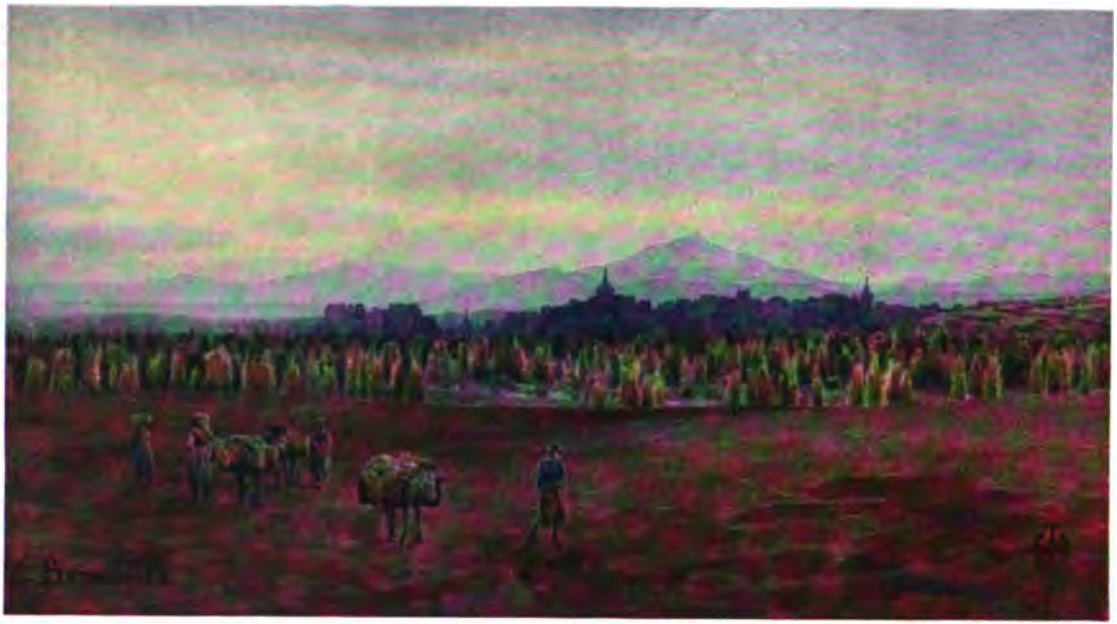
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BENAVENTE

From above the Bridge of Castro Gonzalo.

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Hussars. Here the leading squadrons of Napoleon just got into touch with the rearguard of the retreating Moore;—and received a smart buffet for their forwardness, which was not at all to the Emperor's taste. The cavalry of the Imperial Guard had unexpectedly forded the river; and were wellnigh overwhelming the pickets, when Paget and his horsemen swooped upon them from behind the houses, rolled them up with the loss of half their number, and captured their general, Lefebre Desnouettes. Had Napoleon been an hour or two earlier he might himself have been an eye-witness of their discomfiture from the high ground above the Esla, the point from which my sketch was made. And it is a pity he missed the opportunity; for it was not till Waterloo that he would again see British cavalry in action, and it was the same Paget who was to lead them on that momentous day.

The *mêlée* took place on the broad poplared plain which lies between the town and the river, and the old bridge of Castro Gonzalo spans the torrent a little below the Frenchmen's ford. It is a long, uneven stone structure, with three timbered spans to remind us of the work of Moore's sappers; and the steep bank which rises above it is famed

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for a humbler scuffle, but one which was no less creditable to the parties chiefly concerned. Three days before the cavalry skirmish, when the French were known to be approaching, Privates Walton and Jackson of the 43rd were posted here at nightfall with orders that, if attacked, one should hold his ground and the other run back to call the picket. The night was dark and squally, and the flood of foemen poured over them before they were aware. Jackson ran back: but the horsemen were close behind him, and he was cut down even as he gave the alarm. But when the picket stormed up and the assailants were swept back into the darkness, they had not yet finished with Walton,—that sentry was still at his post. His uniform was pierced in twenty places and his bayonet was twisted like a corkscrew; but like the "brave Lord Willoughby"[1] he was scrupulously holding his ground!

A finger-post and a kilometre stone stood side by side on the branch road at the summit. The former said "To Zamora," and the latter "38 kilos"; whereat we rejoiced and set our pace more leisurely, for the daylight would last us for nearly

[1] "Who would not give a foot of ground
For all the Devils in Hell."
—*Ballad of Lord Willoughby.*

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another three hours. Yet presently as the tale of *kilos* petered out we began to experience misgivings. The bare wide plateau of the *Tierra de Campos* still rolled away before us fold beyond fold; the sun was already close upon the horizon; and where was the Duero valley wherein Zamora lies?

Three *kilos* more,—and still no sign of our haven. —Two *kilos*,—one,—and our hopes were dashed to the ground. Our road shot us out into one of the most desolate stretches of the great highway from Madrid to Vigo; and a venerable shepherd who suddenly materialised out of the empty landscape blandly informed us that Zamora was just "four leagues." Our mistake was obvious enough. The 88 *kilos*, had of course been reckoned from the junction with the highway. But a couple of wary continental travellers should have been on their guard against so stale a trap.

At the first blush it seemed as though we were destined to fare every bit as badly as we merited. The last glow was dying out of the sky behind us, and a grumbling thunderstorm was nursing its wrath for us ahead. But our good luck came to our rescue, and found us a city of refuge:—the little hamlet of Montamarta, which was ambushed in a dip of the road.

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By this time we had learned not to be too dainty about our quarters; yet the *Parador* at Montamarta was so very unassuming that at first we gave it the go-by; and the landlord was an unshaven ruffian who seemed fully capable of the blackest crimes. But the dingy little den to which he ushered us was full of familiar faces:—Velasquez' jolly "Topers" beaming over their wine-cups, the matchless "Booby of Cória," and wild ragged goatherds and vine dressers, with whom Salvator Rosa might have joined in "painting *jabeques*."[1] Rough as they looked, they were all in the mildest of humours. It was a sight to see our murderous-looking landlord truculently dandling his infant; while the mother crouched upon the great hearth in the centre, supervising a multitude of pipkins which were simmering in the glowing embers of the fire. "It is good, isn't it?" she asked eagerly, as we essayed her stew: and she watched every mouthful down our throats with affectionate solicitude to be sure that we did justice to our meal. The kitchen was both dining and sitting-room, and our garret was shared with the children, but our hosts were determined to make us comfort-

[1] A cant term for knifing. The Neapolitan had a standing feud with Spain.

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able, and we forgot their deficiencies in their zeal. There is no gilded luxury in a *Parador*, but at least we felt sure we were welcome. One barely obtains toleration in a *Metropole* or a *Grand*.

With dawn we were again on our journey, dodging our way past the cavalcade of country-folk who were pouring along to market from the various villages around. It was an easy stage. We had nearly made port yester even. Within a few miles we were at Zamora gates.

In our Protestant ignorance of times and seasons we were unaware that the day was the festival of Corpus Christi; consequently the apparition of a fifteen-foot pasteboard giant lurching deviously down the main thoroughfare occasioned us a little mild bewilderment. This wandering ogre, however, was fully entitled to liberty. All respectable Spanish cities retain a team of giants as part of their ordinary municipal outfit, and Corpus Christi day is the great occasion for parading them. The tourist should always arrange to spend that festival in some good old-established city where the choicest breeds are preserved.

Zamora itself is quite old enough for the purpose. Its fine old Romanesque cathedral was built by no less a person than the Bishop Don

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Hieronymo, "that good one with the shaven crown," who so ably represented the Church militant among the companions of the Cid. But long before his day the old frontier fortress had made itself a name by many a desperate resistance to the Moor, and the boast that "Zamora was not won in an hour," still clings to the old dismantled ramparts which were once its justification.[1]

Moreover, the story of the greatest leaguer of all, is it not written in the book of the Chronicle of the Cid, and as famous in Spanish annals as the siege of Troy? For it came to pass that in the eleventh century King Fernando the Great,[2] on his deathbed, divided his kingdoms among his children; and the immediate and obvious consequence was a five-cornered family duel which set all the said kingdoms by the ears. Sancho of Castile had quickly dispossessed his brothers Garcia and Alfonso of Galicia and Leon; and his sister Elvira had yielded to him her town of Toro. Only Urraca his elder sister still held her patri-

[1] The proverb is still quite current. A carrier of whom we inquired the distance to Zamora oracularly answered that "It could never be gained in an hour."

[2] See p. 60.

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ZAMORA

From the banks of the Duero.

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mony; and Zamora was too important a pledge to be left in any hands but his own.

"So King Sancho drew near and beheld Zamora how strongly it was built, upon a cliff, with many massy towers and the river Duero running at the foot thereof." It was no light task to reduce it, and he proffered Valladolid in exchange. But my lady was in no mood to barter her beautiful stronghold for commonplace Valladolid, and doubtless regarded the offer from the same standpoint as her practical councillors,—"He who assails you on the rock would soon drive you from the plain."

The Castilian army lacked the aid of its champion: for Ruy Diaz had been bred up with the princess at Zamora in Don Arias Gonzalo's household, and would not fight against her in person "for the sake of old times." Yet King Sancho was very competent to manage his own battles; and though his assaults were abortive, he soon began to feel more sanguine of blockade. Zamora was reduced to the last extremity when Vellido Dolphos, a knight of the princess's, put into practice against King Sancho the old ruse of Gobryas and Sextus Tarquinius. He feigned desertion, won the confidence of the king, and assassinated him under the walls in the course of

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a pretended reconnaissance, escaping again to the city when the deed was done. Less fortunate than his prototypes who gained credit for their services, Vellido Dolphos has ever since been held up to execration as the very type and pattern of a traitor; and Don Diego Ordoñez gave voice to the wrath of the Castilians by issuing a formal challenge to the whole city of Zamora,—man, woman, and child, the babe unborn, and the fishes in the river: —which even Don Quixote considered was going a trifle too far. Yet the city was saved; for the heir to the throne was Alfonso, and his return from exile put an end to the civil war.

It is a shame to tell the story in prose. Yet we cannot refrain from recalling how Don Arias Gonzalo, the princess' foster-father, pointed out to Don Diego Ordoñez what a very serious thing he had done in challenging a whole cathedral city. How (no doubt with a grim chuckle) he produced the Rules for such case made and provided, whereby it appeared that the challenger must meet five champions in succession, and be declared disgraced if he failed against any one;—which was considerably more than Don Diego had bargained for! Nevertheless he put a bold face on the matter and gallantly met and slew his two first antagonists.

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But the third contest was indecisive; so honour was declared satisfied, and all imputations withdrawn. The old chivalrous legend makes a capital sauce for our musings as we pace the still formidable ramparts from which Doña Urraca once looked down upon her foes; or gaze up from the fortified bridge at the rock-built city above us, towering over the waters of the Duero like the very embodiment of romance.

But meanwhile it is still Corpus Christi day; and the giants are becoming impatient. We found them all four at the bridge-head, attended by a large retinue of loiterers, and waiting outside a church door, like camels at the eye of a needle. The show had not really begun. But as we approached to investigate, there suddenly gushed upon us out of the church itself as strange a medley as that which encountered Don Quixote on a similar anniversary in the chariot of the Cortes of Death. First, four minor giants—great goggling pumpkin-headed Prince Bulbos—and the drum and fife band of Falstaff's ragged regiment. Then the processional cross and candlesticks, and Our Lady gorgeous in a white silk frock, borne shoulder-high on a litter, with her canopy bucketting along behind her about half a length to the bad. More

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saints, also on litters—the boys struggling and fighting for the honour of acting as bearers, and getting cuffed into a shortlived sobriety by their indignant elders. And finally the Host itself in its silver ark surrounded by chanting priests with banners and tapers. The giants closed in behind it as it issued from the door and beamed serenely down the long procession from their commanding elevation in the rear.

Whether the spectacle were a sacrament or a circus, seemed at first an open question; but it was soon resolved. At once every head was uncovered and every knee was bowed, and "*His Majesty's*"[1] progress through the kneeling throng seemed all the more impressive for its incongruous trappings.

Beyond the bridge the procession received its final embellishment in the accession of a mounted guard of honour; and throughout the rest of the day it continued to parade the streets and call at the various churches, while the populace thronged the balconies, crossing themselves, and cheering, and showering their paper flowers impartially upon saints and giants and the bald heads of the accompanying priests—an attention which did not

[1] The recognised Spanish title for the Host.

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ZAMORA

Church of Sta Maria de la Horta.

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appear at all gratifying to the cavalry horses of the escort.

The last we saw of them was in the market square at evening. The giants were standing at the corners; and in the centre sat Margaret of Antioch, Virgin and Martyr, on a grand practicable dragon which could wag its own head and tail. She was understood to be an "Extra," the exclusive property of Zamora, and not to be met with in less favoured localities. But precisely what she was doing in this galley we could not ascertain. As for the giants, they are allegorical, and typify the four quarters of the globe;—concerning which explanation one can only say that it is little better than none.

The very Highest of High Masses was celebrated in the cathedral in honour of the occasion. The priests were in their most gorgeous vestments; the altar almost buried under a pyramid of silver plate; and the walls of the cloisters draped with magnificent pieces of old Spanish tapestry—Corah, Dathan and Abiram going down into the pit on horseback like true *caballeros*, and Pharaoh pursuing the Israelites in a coach and four. The service as usual was rather of a go-as-you-please character; for the *Coro* and *Capilla*

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Mayor[1] being completely enclosed, it is only possible to watch the proceedings from the transepts at the intersection. The congregation generally seem to treat the affair like a "Caucus Race." They look on when they like, and leave off when they like, and spend the intervals strolling round the aisles. You are of course requested not to spit, or wear wooden shoes (which seem equally obnoxious to Roman Catholics and Orangemen[2]). But otherwise there are no restrictions: and there are certainly great attractions in the side shows; for the chapels are a museum of medieval art.

The silver ark in which the Host made its progress was on show in one of the aisles. All Spanish cathedral bodies are inordinately proud of this piece of furniture (which is generally modern and tawdry); and there is no nearer way to the sacristan's heart than to tell him that his specimen is a finer one than that which you saw last at some rival town—Salamanca, for instance. There is a warm neighbourly hatred between

[1] Presbytery.

[2] "Here's to the glorious, pious and immortal memory of the great and good King William, who delivered us from Popery, brass money, *and wooden shoes*!"

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Zamora and Salamanca; and once when I incautiously admitted that the Salamanca people had told me there was nothing to see here, I thought I should have produced an *émeute*.

Wherefore I would exhort future travellers not to be misled by those Salamanca people. For Zamora is not merely ancient; it is even (in some ways) up to date. It is somewhat of a shock to an antiquarian to discover that the town is fully equipped with electric light; still more so to realise that the power station is established in the old church of Sta Maria de la Horta, with the dynamos purring among the arcades, and the chimney tucked in behind the tower. But one soon gets reconciled to these little incongruities. In Spain they are really so common that one learns to expect them from the first.

The town of Toro stands some twenty miles further up the river than Zamora, and makes a capital partner for its neighbour. Indeed, at first sight it seems even more imposingly situated, for it rises on a much loftier hill. But its cliffs are only of soft alluvial deposit instead of solid rock; and its walls built only of mud, which has now nearly crumbled away. In other respects they are not ill-matched, for the streets of Toro are fully

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as picturesque as those of Zamora, and its great collegiate church not unworthy of comparison with the cathedral.

The streets, as in most Spanish towns, are empty and deserted during the heat of the afternoon; the houses closely shuttered, and the people within doors. But as soon as the shadows have lengthened across the roadway, they turn out unanimously on to the pavement, where they sit spinning, sewing, and gossiping, in a sort of semi-publicity. In unsophisticated districts the women (like mermaids) are much addicted to combing each other's hair. The operator sits on a low chair or doorstep, while her subject settles herself upon the ground at her feet, with her head thrown back upon the other's lap, and her thick black mane flooding out over her knees. A very pretty and poetical little group they make—*if you do not pry too curiously into the details.* The younger women have frequently magnificent hair; for they are quite innocent of "transformations," yet their brows are most copiously crowned. One girl at Salamanca wore a thick black pigtail that was positively tapping her heels; and the beauty of Astorga (who was also of pigtail age) was not many inches inferior.

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A SPANISH PATIO

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The majority of the houses in the town are probably not more than a couple of centuries old; but amongst them are a few genuine *Solares*, once the homes of *hidalgos* and grandees. It was to one of these that the "*Conde Duque*" of Olivares, the celebrated minister of Philip IV., retired upon his disgrace and banishment from court; philosophically busying himself with the cultivation of cabbages,—those gawky long-stalked abortions, uncannily suggestive of Encrinites, which still fill all the gardens round the town. Here he was visited by Gil Blas, his quondam secretary, who flattered him with smug allusions to Diocletian. Here also he used occasionally to entertain a more worthy guest, — the painter Velasquez, who was too high-minded to desert his old patron merely because he was under the displeasure of the king. Politically Olivares was as worthless and corrupt as any of his rivals, yet he evidently had an attractive personality. Quevedo, imprisoned four years in the Leonese dungeon for lampooning him, would probably remember him in a less amiable light!

The lofty situation of the city gives it an immensely extensive outlook; for the left bank of the Duero is flat and low-lying, and but for the

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interposition of the high heathy ground about Fuentesauco, one would almost certainly be able to descry the spires of Salamanca itself. Doubtless Marshal Marmont used frequently to pace the terrace of the collegiate church when his head-quarters were established here in the summer of 1812; gazing out over his future battleground and planning those intricate manœuvres which were to close in disaster and disgrace.

The scene of that final catastrophe is too far distant to be visible. But a scarcely less notable conflict actually takes its name from the town. This was the famous battle of Toro, which put an end to the civil war at the opening of the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, and seated the Catholic kings firmly upon their throne. The rebellious nobles had fortified themselves by an alliance with Alfonso of Portugal, and both Toro and Zamora were in their hands. Alfonso's headquarters were at Toro, but Zamora was besieged by Ferdinand, and Alfonso marched to its relief. Seeing that both towns stand on the northern bank of the river, it is difficult to understand what the Portuguese king could hope to effect by advancing on the south. Perhaps he fancied that Zamora still commanded the bridge and that he would thus be able to enter

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TORO

From the banks of the Duero.

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unopposed. But Ferdinand's grip was too close; the bridge was in his hands, and Alfonso had no choice but to return.

Ferdinand hurried his forces across the river in pursuit. His own army, as usual in medieval days, could not be maintained at fighting strength for many weeks together, and he was now nowise loth "to put it to the touch to gain or lose it all." He came up with his foe a little distance short of Toro. Mendoza was leading; and headed the charge against the troops of his brother prelate the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo, with a breezy vehemence worthy of old Picton at Vitória, "Come on, you villains! I'm as good a Cardinal as he!" The weary, overmarched Portuguese were unable to sustain the onset; and their only retreat to Toro lay over the narrow patchwork bridge. Alfonso himself escaped, but there was no further fighting. The Catholic kings commemorated their victory by the erection of the great church of San Juan de los Reyes at Toledo, and the revolted nobles hastened to "come in" upon the best available terms.

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CHAPTER VIII

SALAMANCA

SPAIN is far poorer in lakes than in mountains: and the deficiency has compensations, as it discourages the breeding of flies. But it offers a rare opportunity for the disquisitions of a militant geologist, for the lakes must have swamped all other physical features in the days when the hills were young. Liebana and the Vierzo have been already conceded, but he regards these as drops in the ocean. Now he claims the whole basin of the Duero from the Cordillera of Cantabria to the Sierras of Grédos and Guadarrama, from the highlands of la Demanda and Moncayo to the rocky barrier on the frontiers of Portugal, through which the pent-up waters at length cleft their passage to the sea.

Now the dry bed of an ancient lake is not in itself an ideal foundation for a landscape; particularly when its original conformation is remorse-

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lessly emphasised by the entire omission of fences and of trees. The mud which formed the bottom has settled unevenly; and the rivers have eroded it into yawning channels, whose steep sides (so prominent at Toro) are scarped and furrowed into myriads of wrinkles by the scouring of the winter rains. The district is not unfertile, for it is a land of corn and wine and oil-olive, and water may be found at no great depth; yet the surface soil is parched and dusty, the villages few and far between, and great tracts of the higher ground consist of untilled heaths where the ilex and cistus make their profit out of the heritage unclaimed by man.

It scarcely seems an interesting district for a walking tour, yet we were barely started before we fell in with one who thought otherwise. He was English, of course:—mad as usual, despite his Spanish domicile; and we fraternised with him at a wayside fountain where he recognised us as compatriots (by our Spanish) directly we saluted him. Our programmes had something in common, but his was by far the more onerous, and none but the veriest devotee of the *Wanderlust* could have ventured to undertake it without some inward qualms. A long solitary tramp, and mostly

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through desolate country, over mountain and moorland, from Toro, all the way to Valéncia del Cid. True, he was a naturalist and an antiquary, and could speak the language like a native; yet, if he was proof against boredom, he must have been very good company to himself. It is not every traveller who could rely so exclusively on his own resources. The ideal tramp, like Don Quixote's ideal knight-errant, needs to be equipped with "most of the sciences in the world."

Fortunately the cyclist's self-sufficiency is not tested nearly so highly. He moves both further and faster than the pedestrian,—covering two days' march in a single morning's ride. For him the great Spanish plains are shorn of half their monotony; and if he loves Spain he may blame me for hinting at monotony even here. He finds something strangely exhilarating in the gorgeous sunshine, the dry crisp air, the unrivalled immensity of landscape, and the all-pervading silence, so grateful after London's maddening din. Spain is pre-eminently a land of ample horizons, of panoramas, and bird's-eye views. The hollow conformation of the plains gives the widest of scope to the vision, and the pale blue peaks which enclose them may be as much as one hundred

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miles away. Standing on the summit of the Guadarrama passes, we were wellnigh able to persuade ourselves that the peaks just above us might disclose a view extending from the Cantabrian mountains even to the Sierra Nevada; —all the kingdoms of Spain and the glory of them at a single *coup-d'œil.*

The purity of the atmosphere indeed is downright bewildering, and our first preconceptions of distances went wandering wildly astray. Even as far on our way as Madrid, a fortnight later, we found that we had not yet been schooled to credit the milestones against the evidence of our eyes. Madrid lay there before us: we could tell every house, every window. It was absurd to try and convince us that it was ten kilometres away! Yet we passed nine stony compurgators ere we reached the Toledo gateway; and even our own cyclometers professed themselves "all of a tale." The illusion is accentuated by the great distances which separate the hamlets, and the absence of any intervening landmarks on the bare red plains between.

Meanwhile the details of the landscape are far from uninteresting. The heath flowers are varied and plentiful and the butterflies brilliant in the

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extreme. The whole air rings with the yelling of the cicadas or the croaking of the frogs in the rare and starveling streams. Little brown lizards are numerous even in the mountains, but here on the plains is a more imposing breed; great green monsters fifteen inches in length, who lie out sunning themselves in the dust of the roadway, and scuttle wildly to cover as our shadows sweep silently by. The natives eat them;—so possibly does the tourist also, for many are the unsuspected ingredients which are involved in the meshes of a Spanish stew.

The birds also, such as there are, seem exclusively decorative specimens. First among these are the hoopoes, with their black and white barred plumage, and their feather crowns, the gift of Solomon the Wise. They have a strong fellow-feeling for the cyclist, and flit from tree to tree along the road beside him with the most engaging *cameraderie.* If they get too far ahead they will perch and await him, cocking their crests and *hoo-poo-pooing* encouragement; and once more resume their swift drooping flight as soon as he draws level. Should these lines meet their eyes they are assured that their companionship was much appreciated. The little watery gullies where the frogs live are

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SALAMANCA

Arcades in the Plaza de la Verdura.

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generally picketted by the storks. Magpies too are alarmingly plentiful in the wild stony districts along the feet of the mountains. Seven at a time is all very well,—at least one knows Who to expect then,—but what grislier horror is portended by thirteen? A Grand Inquisitor?

Men as a rule seem scarcely so numerous as magpies, and one may ride for miles at a stretch without encountering a soul; but those whom you do meet are admirably in rapport with their surroundings; and though their pursuits may be prosaic their appearance would illustrate a romance. This solitary horseman, for instance, is probably a most commonplace personage in reality. We shall sit next to him at *comida* in an hour or two, and discover that he is an eminently innocuous bagman. But out here in the midst of the wilderness, clad in his broad-brimmed hat and his ample black cloak which muffles him up to the eyes, he might pass as a living embodiment of Roque Guinart himself, and we rather plume ourselves on our resolution in venturing to keep to the road. The Spaniard as a rule wraps himself up amazingly when he goes a-travelling; and the Scotch shepherd sallying out to visit his flock in a December snowstorm is not more jealously

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plaided than the Castilian carrier trudging along beside his pack mules, with his purple shadow blotting the dusty roadway at his feet. By way of contrast one may occasionally see the small children scampering about outside the cabin doors without so much as a rag of any description whatever—an infinitely more enviable costume.

The greater number of the vehicles are ramshackle tilt-waggons, drawn by a goodly array of mules, five or seven in a string. These have a horrid habit of pulling *en échelon*, so that each beast has a clear view of all the road ahead of him, and can make up his mind exactly what he means to shy at. This formation occupies the whole width of the roadway, and the driver (being a driver) is of course asleep; consequently, if you have a rock wall on one side and an everlasting vertical precipice on the other, you had better be careful how you pass. Indeed, it is well to give them a wide berth in any case, for even the immortal Bayard himself, "without fear and without reproach," professed himself anxious about his shins in the neighbourhood of a Spanish mule. They are harnessed with delightful inconsequence in all sorts of gay tags and fringes, and scraps of old caparisons of yellow Cordovan leather; while all deficiencies are eked

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out with string. This requires great quantities of string. The waggons which they draw are equally patchworky, with their cargoes bulging out on all sides in an imminently precarious fashion. In the wine districts they generally carry an "extra" in the shape of a huge tun slung under the axle between the lofty wheels.

It is worthy of remark that a Spanish "gee-upper"[1] is commonly unable to think of any worse name for a mule than its own. "Arré! Mula!!" he cries, and collapses impotently. What more can he call it? It *is* a mule. To do him justice, however, he seldom resorts to blows to reinforce his vocabulary; and the cruelty so often inveighed against in southern countries is not very noticeable in northern Spain. The beasts are gaunt, bony, and ill-kempt, but herein they are no worse off than their drivers: they are too often worked when galled or foundered; yet this is but negative heedlessness, and positive misusage is rare.

The temper of the beasts is uncertain. The ox and the ass are phlegmatic, but the horse and mule (which have no understanding) have decidedly fidgetty nerves. The mules are frequently gigantic animals, as high-standing and big-boned as an

[1] *Arriero*, from *arré*! gee-up!

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English dray-horse, though much less heavy and muscular. Mixed teams are frequently requisitioned in the mountain districts. One sample that we met had a horse for leader, then two mules tandem, a pair of oxen, and a mule in the shafts; another had a mule for shafter, with two more mules outside the shafts, a fourth ahead, and three yoke of oxen to lead the way. It is extremely fashionable to finish off the string with a diminutive donkey (generally the smaller the better) tacked on as a sort of afterthought at the head of the whole cavalcade. He looks as though meant for a tassel, but is really played as a pace-maker; for he is always the fastest walker and the most enthusiastic worker in the team.

There was a real "little Benjamin" of jackasses that we met on the road near Segóvia. Two men were coming into the town in charge of a bull; and by way of getting the hulk steered with as little personal attention as might be, it had struck them to harness this trifle to the monster's spreading horns. Had the bull really resented the arrangement it would have cost him but a turn of the head to heave the whole equipage over the parapet among the tops of the poplars below. Fortunately, however, he was not actively annoyed

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SALAMANCA

Church of San Martin.

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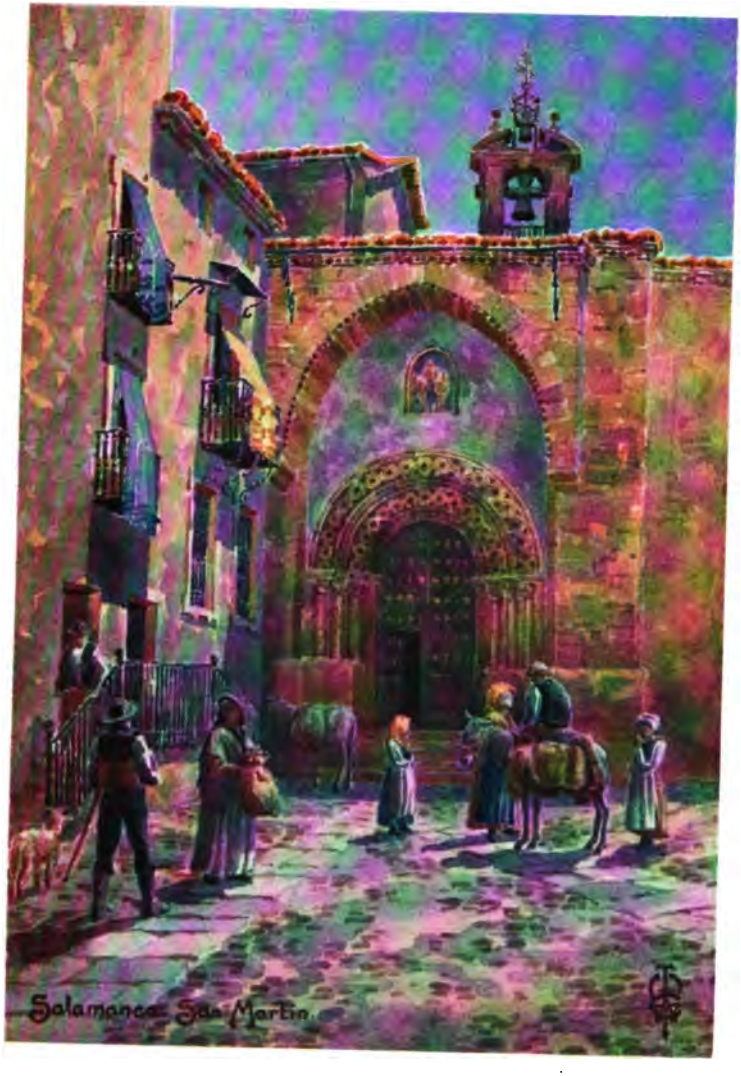


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SALAMANCA

Church of San Martin.

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—only rather grumpy and puzzled. Every few steps he would stop, shaking his head and bellowing; while his little pilot gathered himself together, drove in his toes, and flung himself into the collar with the exalted enthusiasm that does not reck of odds. He fairly squirmed with glee as his charge condescended to move a step or two forward, and evidently considered that every yard of progress was exclusively attributable to himself.

We took our last look at the Cantabrian mountains from the crest of the watershed between the Duero and Tormes; and the same hill that concealed them brought us into full view of another equally imposing range to the southward—the Sierra de Grédos, whose monarch, the Plaza Almanzor, is only a few feet inferior even to the Rock of Ages which dominates Europa Pikes. But it is to the fallows around us that our first attention is owing;—a site which should stir the imagination of an Englishman as Don Quixote's was stirred on the Campo de Montiel.

Over these bleak, red plough lands for six long July days in 1812 the armies of Marmont and of Wellington marched and countermarched and circled round each other like dancers in some vast quadrille or chess players fencing for an opening.

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Neither leader would risk a doubtful action; for the French Army of the Centre was rapidly approaching, and its junction might make or mar a victory. Almost within speaking distance, they raced for advantage in position, and scarcely once did they pause to exchange a blow. It was a repetition of the old drama enacted centuries before by Cæsar and Afranius upon the plains of Lérida. But the Cæsar of this production was playing Afranius' *rôle.*

Marmont had the pace of his opponent, and Wellington pivoted round Salamanca to guard his communications with Rodrigo. Foiled on the right, Marmont dashed round to the left, forded the Tormes and thrust at Salamanca from the south. Wellington still faced him; but King Joseph was now close upon him, and within two days at furthest the English would be hopelessly outnumbered by the junction of the hostile hosts. Retreat was inevitable: had, indeed, already commenced; for the baggage was on the move, and Wellington was but waiting for nightfall to cover the withdrawal of his fighting line.

"A silver bridge for a retreating enemy," saith the Spanish proverb; but Napoleon's aspiring young marshal had been trained in a more

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aggressive school. He knew that his troops were the speedier, that Joseph's junction would bring a winning superiority of numbers. If he could but hold the English to their position for another day the campaign might be finished at a blow;—and he eagerly pushed on his left under Maucune to command the Rodrigo road. Clausel's brigade, already wheeling in from the rear, would link the left to the centre; and his foe would be in a cleft stick. But Clausel's march was limed in the thick web of olive woods which mantles the hills towards Alba; the fatal gap yawned conspicuous behind the hurrying columns; and in an instant Wellington pounced upon Maucune.

Well was it for Marmont that the day was now far spent, and that the fords of the Tormes had been left unguarded! For never was victory more rapid or more complete. In forty minutes Marmont's magnificent army of forty thousand men were a horde of disorganized fugitives; and the whole of the central provinces lay defenceless at the feet of his foe.

It seems a little strange that Salamanca should contain no monument of the great battle which freed half Spain from the grasp of the invader, and which, in after years, the mighty victor him-

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self was wont to regard as his masterpiece—the Austerlitz of his career. Its only memorials nowadays are a few forgotten tablets on the walls of the great cathedral: from the roof of which the anxious townsfolk once heard the sudden roar of the closing battle, and watched the great column of smoke and dust soaring up slowly over Arapiles into the placid evening sky.

Salamanca shows itself off to best advantage when approached from the southern side. It stands upon rising ground on the right bank of the Tormes, with a fine old Roman bridge leading up to it across the stream. The river banks are lined with voluble washerwomen,—at least a quarter of a mile of them, fairly elbowing one another as they chatter over their work; and behind them the red-roofed houses of the city are piled up the slope in picturesque disarray. The most prominent object is the great cathedral, a sixteenth century Gothic building of the type that is only to be encountered in Spain. It is of imposing proportions, and lavishly ornamented with a marvellous profusion of delicate carving which could not possibly have stood the exposure to the weather in any less favourable clime. Yet it lacks the deep mouldings and majestic solidity

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SALAMANCA

From the left bank of the Tormes.

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of earlier works; and this somewhat academic pretentiousness is not nearly so impressive as the stunted strength of the old cathedral which nestles under the shadow of its more showy sister —a typical Romanesque edifice, rude, massive, and solemn, like an oak beside a poplar colonnade.

No city suffered more than Salamanca from Napoleon's disastrous invasion; and what that implies let her fellow victims testify! The French are pleased to regard themselves as the modern Athenians;—the modern Vandals is the name that their neighbours might prefer! Gaiseric himself never systematised pillage like Napoleon; and who can wonder at the savage retaliation of the *Partidas* when he sees the havoc which was wrought in unhappy Spain? "Twenty-five convents, twenty-five colleges, and twenty-five arches to the bridge," was the boast of the citizens of Salamanca before the days of their visitation. But no less than twenty colleges and thirteen convents (amongst them some of the noblest Renaissance monuments) were razed to the ground by the remorseless Marmont when he built his three great redoubts to fortify the town against Wellington in 1812; and a ghastly bald scar in the midst of the crowded city still marks the spot where the

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tyrant's hand was laid. It is but poor consolation to remember that the ramparts erected at this frightful cost crumpled up like the pasteboard helmet beneath the stroke of his mightier foe: and that Marmont himself reaped a small instalment of his whirlwind within actual sight of the city which he had marred.

Perhaps it is hardly too much to assert that at the end of the eighteenth century Salamanca must have been the most magnificently housed university in the world. Even now, after all her losses, I can think of no other on the Continent which can so well stand comparison with our own. But, alas! she has fallen upon evil days. The famous Irish college had a population of seven (Dons and Students included) at the time of our visit; and the salaries of the professors are such as no master of a board school would consider adequate in England. The Augustan age of Salamanca commenced in the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella; and was perhaps already declining when Gil Blas visited it with his adventurous young mistress masquerading in her doublet and hose. Then the city had more students than it has now inhabitants; and even Paris and Bologna admitted the superiority of the Salamanca schools. She was a progressive

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university too; and albeit she rejected Columbus, she at least accepted Copernicus—a considerable step on the way. In one respect her example might inspire present-day universities, for here it was that a lady first held a professorial chair.

The great gate of the Library is now the chief relic of these bygone glories: and that gem of the early Renaissance is worthily supported by the arcaded quadrangles of some of the colleges and schools. They are built of the warm golden-brown stone which is common to most Salamancan monuments, and their richly-carved parapets and fantastically-shaped arches have an air of oriental opulence which is very taking to the eye.

But even apart from its churches, convents, and colleges, Salamanca would still remain notable by reason of its palaces alone. First among these is the *Casa de las Conchas*,—spangled all over with the great stone scallop shells from which it derives its name. It is even more striking and original than its larger and lordlier rival, the famous *Palacio de Monterey;* and I owe it a special acknowledgment for the liberty which I have taken with it in pirating its façade to serve as the cover of this volume.

The Castilian and Leonese *casas* have much in

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common with the typical Florentine palaces; and even their cousins of Aragon only differ from them in so far as they are brick instead of stone. Towards the street they present a square and solemn façade, plain or heavily rusticated, and pierced with but few windows, which are always stoutly barred. The entrance is large and plain, and generally arched over with enormously deep *voussoirs*, which have a very imposing effect. Within is an open *patio* surrounded by a double arcade. A fine staircase in a recess gives access to the upper tier; and the rooms which are ranged around the gallery all open direct into the air. The centre of the *patio* is occupied by a well or fountain, and is often filled with flowers. The type seems exceptionally suitable to a semi-tropical country; yet modern builders will have none of it; and, though common in all provincial capitals, it is nowhere to be met with in Madrid.

In a second and smaller type of house the great entrance doorway occupies practically the whole of the ground-floor frontage. Obviously it was generally entered on horseback, and the hall within (like that of a village *posada*) served as ante-chamber both to the living rooms above and to the stables behind. The family lived on the first and

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SALAMANCA

The Puerta del Rio, with the Cathedral Tower.

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second floors, while the third was originally a *belvedere*. But nowadays the latter has been enclosed and the ground floor generally converted into a shop.

It is one of the penalties of sketching in a crowded city that everybody who has no immediate occupation of his own becomes consumingly interested in yours. There is but one spot in Salamanca where one is quite secure from surveillance, and that is opposite the porch of San Martin, perhaps the most frequented corner in the town. Here, balanced gingerly upon a narrow ledge, you overlook the heads of the bystanders, and even the most agile urchin can find no foothold in your rear.

Yet the immunity is hardly worth winning. At best it is very uncomfortable; and if you submit to your heckling, the entertainment is not all on one side. At the bridge head it even secured me the offer of a commission. The Boniface of the little wine-shop was urgent with me to reproduce my sketch enlarged upon the front of his bar. My recompense was to comprise full board and lodging during the operation,—and that would have been no trifle. But he must have had considerable faith in the covering capacity of water colours to pit a

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little twenty-pan paint-box against fifty square feet of deal boards.

But it was at the *Puerta del Rio* that I found my *entourage* of most practical utility. It had been snowing overnight in the mountains, and the Sierra de Grédos was draped from base to summit in a mantle of dazzling white. In spite of the brilliant sunshine the wind was incredibly bitter, and the miserable sketcher would have been frozen without his human screen. Truly "Winter is not over till the fortieth of May" within reach of those icy summits. The Duke of Wellington asserted that the coldest thing in his recollection was the wind at Salamanca in July!

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CHAPTER IX

BÉJAR, ÁVILA, AND ESCORIAL

THERE were "Bulls at Salamanca" (so ran the placards) on the day when we were to resume our journey towards the south; and the *Señor Patron* seemed quite crestfallen at realising that we had no intention of deferring our departure in order to witness the fun. Bull-fighting was *not* cruel, he protested. That was all our inexplicable British prejudice. And as patrons of prize-fights and football we ought to be the last to throw stones. We were rather expected to sympathise with the national sport of Spain.

His conclusion was truer than his reasoning. There are certain thrilling forms of playing with death amiably tolerated by the British public which are logically no whit better than bull-fighting: and it is not humanity but fashion that dictates to us which to condemn. Only a few days earlier an unfortunate woman had been killed at Madrid

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while "looping the loop" on a motor; and the Spanish papers (those eager reporters of bull-fights) were all most properly indignant at the dangerous and degrading character of this new-fangled foreign show. Our British high-toned repugnance is distinctly less moral than squeamish. But we did not want our feelings harrowed in the midst of a holiday tour.

Bull-fighting is one of the many sports that have been ruined by professionalism. In the days when the young gallants of the court encountered the bull themselves, on their own horses, before the eyes of their lady-loves in the *Plaza Mayor*, there was a spice of chivalry about the proceeding that half redeemed its brutality. It was truly a sport then, albeit a savage one; but now it is merely a show.

Moreover, even our host admitted that this time the *Corrida* would be shorn of its foremost attraction. It was to have been inaugurated by a bull-fighting *Pierrot* who was wont to await the first rush of the monster motionless upon a tub in the centre of the arena. The bull would charge headlong upon him,—check, sniff, and turn away. No doubt he owed his immunity to his apparent lifelessness; but it was billed as the "power of the

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human eye." Alas! on the last occasion his programme had miscarried. Just at the critical moment a fly had settled on his nose; and for one infinitesimal fraction of a second the entire voltage of the human eye was switched upon that miserable insect. The effect on the fly was not stated, but it markedly reassured the bull. Poor *Pierrot* had been tossed as high as a rocket, and apparently was not expected down again in time for the performance to-day.

The two English visitors to Salamanca also failed to figure at the function. They had crossed the bridge very early in the morning, and were heading for the mountains of Grédos by the highway leading to Béjar. The actual battlefield was passed upon the left, about four miles distant from Salamanca, subtending the angle formed by the roads to Alba and Béjar; and the olive woods which so hampered Clausel spread wide around us over the hills behind. It was a just Nemesis which overtook the invaders on this occasion, for the destruction of olive trees for fuel had been one of their most gratuitous outrages during the war. The olive is a slow grower, and a few hours' reckless cutting might take half a century to repair.

At first the road rises gradually and the country

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is open and undulating; but soon it gets deeply involved in a labyrinth of mountains, and tacks despairingly backwards and forwards in vain endeavours to twist itself free from the toils. Finally it extricates itself by a frantic rush up a long steep hill, and resumes its journey at first-floor level along the shoulders of the range. Some distance further west it manages to discover a passage across the main ridge into the province of Estremadura; but the town of Béjar itself lies four or five miles upon the hither side.

Hope had told us a flattering tale concerning the attractions of Béjar. A Salamanca gentleman to whom we confided our intention of visiting it had kissed his finger-tips ecstatically at the mere mention of its name. "*Muy bonita!*"[1] he exclaimed. "*Preciosa!!*" And truly his adjectives were excusable; for a more charming situation for a mountain township it is almost impossible to conceive. A long knife-edged ridge is thrown out from the range at right angles. The one street is carried along its crest, and the houses cling to either side of it like panniers on the back of a mule. A great snowclad peak, one of the minor

[1] As in Italian, the diminutive is a sort of endearing form of superlative.

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BÉJAR

An Approach to the Town.

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summits of the Sierra, towers above the head of the ridge and gravely surveys the street from end to end; while the extreme point looks out over the wild hummocky country towards Ciudad Rodrigo, with the great masses of the Sierra de Gata and Peña de Francia surging up truculently above the lower hills. Béjar is a fragment of Tyrolean scenery dropped accidentally on the borders of Estremadura. Its buildings are nothing remarkable, but its situation is irreproachably picturesque.

The town was holding a little *Fiesta* of its own upon the day of our visit, and the advent of two pedlars with knapsacks was naturally accepted as a part of the show. Several anxious enquirers stopped us in the street to ascertain "what our honours were selling"; and the prevalent notion appeared to be that we were vendors of edible snails! Many of the country-folk had come in from the remoter villages and were attired in the quaintest of costumes. The women wore very brief skirts, which gave an exceedingly squat appearance to their sturdy thick-set figures. The men had tight black breeches and jerkins adorned with polished metal buttons; enormously broad leather belts something like the cuirasses of the

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Roman legionaries, and forked leather aprons loosely strapped down their thighs. This weird type of dress we had already noticed at Salamanca; and for a hot climate it must be about the most unsuitable ever conceived by man.

The journey from Salamanca to Ávila entails a longer spell of Duero valley scenery than that from Salamanca to Béjar; and for the best part of a day we were perseveringly reeling off league after league of the same dry red plough lands which had already wearied us in the North. It was not till towards evening that the road at last began swerving and plunging upon the great ground-swell which ripples out into the plain from the feet of the Sierra de Guadarrama; and the huge granite boulders littered about among the stunted ilex and gorse which clothed the shaggy ridges apprised us that we had drawn within reach of the derelict *moraines*. Still as we held our course each successive wave bore us higher than its predecessor, till at last we looked down into a wide upland basin, and beheld the towers of Ávila rising proudly upon their daïs in the midst.

There is no other walled town of my acquaintance that flaunts its defences quite so defiantly as Ávila. Its circlet of tower and curtain crests its great

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BÉJAR

A Corner in the Market-place.

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natural *glacis* like the substantialised vision of a mural crown. The walls themselves are only about twelve feet in thickness, which is, of course, a mere trifle compared to Lugo and Astorga; but it is height that tells, and their commanding situation gives them an incomparably finer effect.[1] Only on the further side has the city begun to overflow its ancient cincture; and with its core of tightly-packed houses clustering round its great cathedral-fortress which crowns the brow of the eminence, it still receives its latter-day visitors in the same garb that it donned for the Cid. Doubtless the old rebel barons had an eye to its scenic capabilities when they selected it as the theatre for their mock deposition of Henrique IV. This thing was not to be done in a corner, and the impudent pageant which they enacted under its walls must have been visible for miles round.

But the chief pride and glory of Ávila is the boast that it was the birthplace of Sta Theresa, the "seraphic" lady whom a more emotional epoch has preferred to the martial Santiago, and almost matched with the Virgin herself as the modern patroness of Spain.

[1] They were built at the end of the eleventh century. A singularly fine bit of work for so early a date.

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Sta Theresa was quite a modern saint; and, like her contemporary Ignatius Loyola, much more truly saintly than hagiologists would have us infer. They would rather persist in belauding her visionary ecstasies and ascetic self-mortification. Her practical common-sense and her gentle resolution are dismissed as earthlier virtues: yet it was these that made her a power.

She certainly lost no time in beginning the practice of her profession, for at the age of seven she persuaded her baby brother to run away with her to Barbary to get martyred by the Moors. Being captured and brought home by their distracted parents, they next decided upon becoming hermits. But this notable scheme was also vetoed; —poor little mites! Maybe we know other small children who have started somewhat similarly on the road to canonization; but Theresa's romantic devotion outlasted this fanciful stage. At the age of sixteen she assumed the veil—a step which in wiser years she was not so eager to advocate, but in which she found ample opportunity for the exercise of her piety and her zeal. Her reform of the Carmelite nunneries was achieved in the teeth of great opposition from the hierarchy of the day; and her literary work is of an excellence

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that places her high among the classical writers of Spain. It is to such as her and Loyola, rather than to Torquemada and Ximenes, that the Roman Church owes its hold upon the people. And by these she is dowered with the attributes which belong to Catherine of Siena in another land.

But perhaps the most remarkable honour ever accorded to her is the fact that two hundred years after her death she was actually gazetted commander-in-chief of the Spanish armies in the Peninsula war! Certainly Louis XI. had previously honoured Our Lady of Embrun with the colonelcy of his Scottish Guards. But here was a popular assembly, in the nineteenth century, which could "see him and go one better"; a far more deliberate extravagance than the whim of a fetish-cowed king. Of course there was more method in their madness than appears on the surface. They did not really want a commander-in-chief at all. What they did want was a Name which should fire the enthusiasm of the peasantry, as the citizens of Zaragoza had been fired by the name of Our Lady of the Pillar. At the same time it must be admitted that matters seemed to move more smoothly when she was superseded by the Duke of Wellington.

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The cathedral is a most massive structure of stern grey granite, with its apse bulging out beyond the city walls—battlemented, loop-holed, and machicolated like the profanest bastion of them all. It looks every inch a castle, and has not served amiss when so utilised; for in the great western tower the infant King Alfonso XI. (Father of Pedro the Cruel) was kept safe from his would-be guardians during his long minority, by the Bishop and people of Ávila. The interior of the building is one of the noblest in Spain—severe, gloomy and solemn; but furnished with that surpassing magnificence which only Spanish cathedrals can boast.

The old town itself is full of quaint nooks and corners, and most of its streets and houses are as unalterably medieval as the walls. A county council inspector would probably play sad havoc with them, for even if they are sanitary they are terribly out of repair. There is a smell which lingers distinctive in these old Spanish townships. Not indeed altogether unpleasant, but rather grateful from association, like the smell of the stone walls of the West country after a summer shower. It is compounded of many simples, and its leading ingredient is garlic. But it would be

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ÁVILA

From the North-west.

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hard to prove its innocency before our stern courts of hygiene.

A Spaniard, however, takes his risks more lightly than an Englishman. Like Sancho Panza, he argues that the physician is worse than the disease. Life is a shockingly hazardous business even on wafers and *membrillo*, and perhaps, after all, roast partridge is not quite so deadly as Hippocrates supposed.

Perhaps the most notable of the many monasteries and churches of Ávila is the Convent of San Tomas at the foot of the hill to the south. As in many important Spanish churches, the choir is placed in a great stone gallery at the west end, and in this instance the arrangement is balanced by a similar gallery for the High Altar at the east. The floor is occupied by the beautiful marble monument of Prince Juan, the only son of Ferdinand and Isabella. The Catholic kings, fortunate in all else, desired in vain that greatest blessing of all, the happiness of their children. Juan, the hope of their kingdom, died a few months after his marriage, and his posthumous child was still-born. Isabella, their eldest daughter, torn from the cloister to give an heir to the crown, was married to the Crown Prince of Portugal. Her

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young husband was killed by a fall from his horse; and though she was again married to his successor, she died in child-birth; and her infant son, heir to the whole Peninsula, did not long survive. Poor mad Juana, crazed by the neglect of her worthless husband, was the second daughter of the ill-starred family, and the youngest was Catherine of Aragon.

Ávila lies at an extremely lofty elevation, three thousand feet above sea level; and both here and at Segóvia snow frequently falls as late as the middle of May. The mountains immediately behind it, however, are but the connecting link between the Sierras of Grédos and Guadarrama, and all the loftier peaks lie at some distance east and west. A road leads through the gap to Talavera de la Reyna (a circumstance, it may be remembered, which was extremely fortunate for Sir John Moore).[1] But we, being bound for Madrid, set our course along the north of the mountains, heading eastward to join the main road from Vigo at the little town of Villacastin.

Our course lay over a brown and undulating moorland, with the Duero plains to the left of us and the broken ridges of the Sierra rising up

[1] Moore was at Salamanca and his artillery at Talavera when Napoleon reached Madrid.

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boldly upon the right. The scene might well be matched in Scotland, Donegal, or Connemara; for the granite mountains are very similar in formation, and the purple hardhead which clothes them is an excellent imitation of heather, though of a deeper shade, suggestive of royal mourning. Here and there great tracts of the moorland, many acres in extent, are thickly strewn with gigantic boulders, singly or in heaps, like huge natural cairns. Doubtless these are *blocs perchés*, the relics of extinct glaciers, like the similar blocks on the road from Salamanca, or those near Ribadávia above the Miño vale. The road, as usual, was almost deserted, but conscientiously patrolled by two very large and splendid *carabineros* mounted on humble asses, which could scarcely raise their riders off the ground.

At Villacastin we struck the great royal road for which we had been making, and the mountains stretched out their arms to receive us as we turned our faces towards the south. The day had been well advanced when we quitted Ávila, and now it was nearly dusk. The mountains were of indigo darkness, and the deep, closed valley into which we were plunging was as black as the throat of a wolf. But the white road led us on surely and

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steadily; and we knew that somewhere in the chasm before us was the shelter upon which we were counting for the night.

The *Fonda San Rafael* is a long, low, straggling building, very similar to our own old coaching inns, but much more primitive in style. The village aristocracy were engaged at dominoes in the kitchen; and the time which we wasted in dining they attempted to utilise more profitably by mastering the English tongue. They borrowed our pocket dictionary and started their task with enthusiasm. But this laudable access of energy did not win the success it deserved. Unluckily they commenced operations among the *sn's*—a combination which no Spaniard can ever pronounce without an antecedent *e*. And they came such amazing croppers over "*es-na-îl*," "*es-nâ-ké*," and "*es-ne-êzé*," that their bewildered interpreters got as much at sea as themselves.

The ascent of the *Puerto de Guadarrama* begins immediately beyond the village; a series of long steep zigzags well shaded by slender pine trees—the "spindles of Guadarrama," to which Don Quixote likened Dulcinea. The climb in itself is not particularly arduous, but no doubt it is an ugly place in a December snowstorm; and so Napoleon

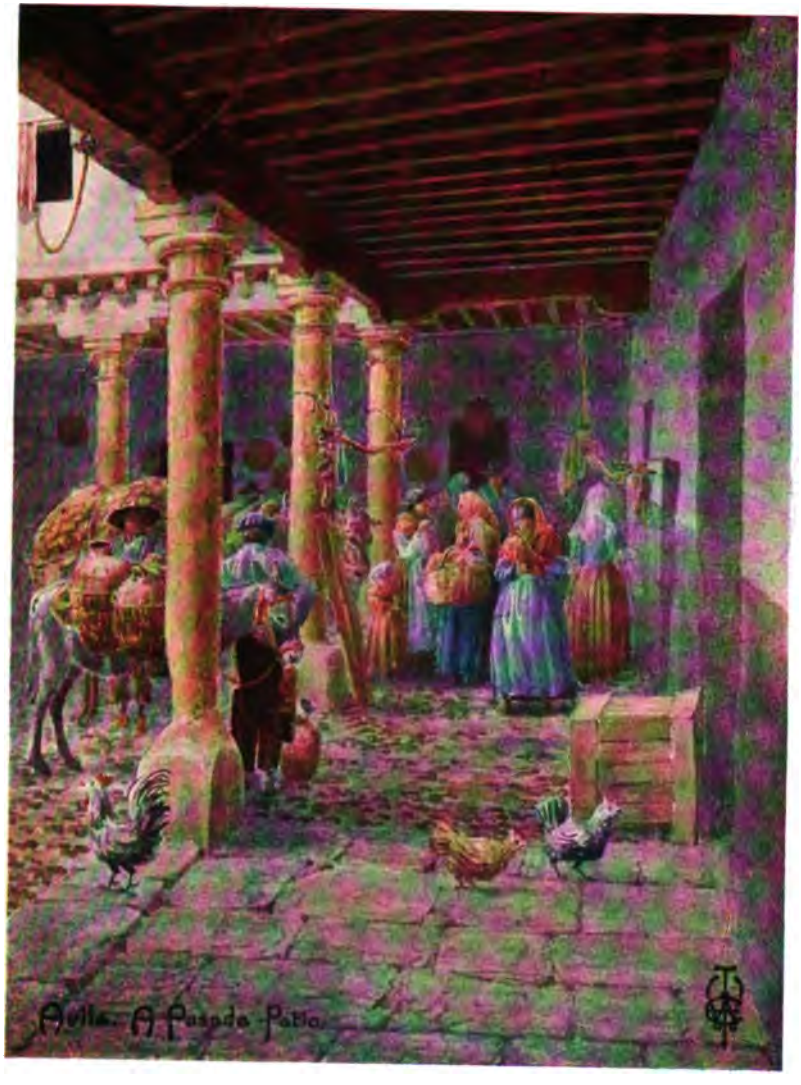
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ÁVILA

A Posada Patio.

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found to his cost, when he forced the passage in 1808, rushing northwards from Madrid to fall upon the adventurous Moore. Marbot has left us a grisly description of its snow-drifts and precipices; and the furious eddies of whirlwind which swept horse and man to destruction as they struggled up the icy paths. But probably his account is a little over-painted; for precipices should be perennial both in summer and winter; but the steepest which we could identify were about of tobogganing pitch.

Viewed from the north, the pass is a saddle at the end of a long deep valley; but its southern face forms an embrasure in a great mountain wall. The whole valley of the Tagus seemed spread beneath us as we gazed down from the summit; the plains all shimmering in a sea of purple heat haze, and the blue Toledan mountains rising faint and ethereal upon the further shore. So "Lot lifted up his eyes and looked and beheld all the Vale of Jordan." The text seems singularly appropriate to many of these vistas of Spain. A little later in the day, when the haze had been lifted by the sunshine, every detail of the country would have shown up as clearly as on a map.

At the foot of the descent we swung to the right

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along a pleasant undulating road amid trees and meadows and hedgerows. And here, as in private duty bound, let us record our gratitude to Don Fernando, who erected the noble fountain whereat we refreshed ourselves by the way. Don Fernando's fountain is a great stone cistern, with the water gushing into it from an upright pillar behind. Verily his spirit is at rest if the wayfarers' prayers may avail him; for nowhere is water more appreciated than in this land of wine.

Don Fernando (*requiescat in pace*) is by no means the only benefactor who has conferred such a boon on his countrymen. Almost every village near the mountains is dowered with a tank in the *plaza*, and a generous jet of water beneath which you may seethe your hissing head. Would that we were as well off in England! For our fountains can furnish no more than a miserable trickle, and even that is frequently dry. How often have we raged unsatisfied from one faithless nozzle to another, while the yokels mocked our agonies with commendations of the beer! Beer is excellent in its way—but not when one is thirsty. Then *on revient toujours à ses premiers amours.* ΑΡΙΣΤΟΝ ΜΕΝ ΥΔΩΡ.

The famous palace of Escorial opened suddenly

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before us as we rounded a shoulder of the mountain, and there can be few palaces in the world which occupy so imposing a site. It is often referred to as standing upon a plain, but the description is entirely misleading. It rises upon the lap of the mountains, high above the level of Madrid. Our first view, moreover, much discounted our preconceived notions regarding its gloomy appearance; for bathed in a flood of southern sunshine, it had rather a cheerful aspect. But the very sunshine itself grew chilled as we narrowed the radius; and the bare rude walls, vast, grey, and featureless, like an enormously exaggerated Newgate, seemed to crush out all the gladness of nature with their cold, unalterable frown.

"First a tomb, next a convent, last a palace," was the ideal at which the founder was aiming; and the massive asceticism of the building is an apt reflection of his mood. It boasts itself the finest of all the great monasteries: and if tested by weight or by measure, the claim could hardly be denied. But this vast gloomy prison is a thing which has nothing in common with the staid beauty of Poblet,[1] or the Aladdin-like brilliance of the *Certosa* at Pavia. Yet the extreme severity of its

[1] The burial-place of the Kings of Aragon.

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style is by no means inappropriate to the great church which forms the central feature; and none that remember its grim associations would wish to see the Escorial other than it is.

The memory of Philip the Prudent is still held in honour by Spaniards, for he reigned in the days of their glory, and was probably the most powerful autocrat who ever occupied the throne. But history's more equable judgment has condemned the reign as a failure, and the monarch as one of the scourges of mankind. True, he has not lacked apologists; for there is an uncanny fascination about his grim personality; and it is not difficult to show some redeeming quality even in a Louis XI. or a Richard III. But most of us prefer our history broadly coloured, with good strong lights and shadows. We must be allowed a real villain occasionally; and, till such time as we get Iago incarnate, Philip II. will do very sufficiently well. "A rake in his youth, a monster in his manhood, a miser in his old age;"—the bitter epitaph scribbled up over his deathbed paints his character in three lines.

And yet none who has once visited the Escorial will thereafter think of Philip without some glimmerings of respect. Our loathing for his

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ESCORIAL

From the East.

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selfish and cruel tyranny is tempered with a kind of shuddering pity for that other side of his character;—his gloomy religious mania, the taint inherent in his blood. There was something of gruesome greatness in the mind which could conceive such a building, "reserving for himself but a cell in the house he was erecting for God."

The Escorial was Philip's most cherished creation. Probably he had a large share in designing it; certainly he watched it stone by stone as it grew. Here he dwelt as "Brother Philip," a monk in his own monastery, "ruling two worlds with a scrap of paper, from a cell on a mountain side." Here he was worshipping when he received the news of Lepanto, and of the destruction of the Armada. And it was with the same resolute stoicism that he learned of the victory and of the defeat. Here he died—the death of Herod Agrippa; sustaining his two months' agony with a constancy worthy of de Seso himself.[1] And all that is left of him rests in the little octagonal chapel beneath the High Altar, where his sire and his successors share his tomb. His portrait by Pantoja hangs on the walls of the library. A dreadful visage,—heartless, deceitful, obstinate,—miserable beyond the power of words to

[1] See p. 261.

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express. But no picture ever painted, no statue ever carved, could reveal his character more vividly than the great gloomy pile of hard grey granite which he himself has bequeathed as a legacy to posterity.

Yet on one point the tyrant-hermit claims our unreserved approbation. He displayed a most excellent taste in the matter of selecting a site. Here we can feel no shadow of sympathy for his critics. His choice was unexceptionable: and those who impugn it are blind. Indeed, this whole range of Sierras is a region of singular beauty, and the charming old towns which lie on the foot hills beneath it, — Béjar and Plaséncia, Ávila and Segóvia, — give it an added interest which mountain districts do not often possess. Charles V. was drawn hither to Yuste, as Philip to Escorial: yet each held an ample dominion and neither was an incapable *connoisseur*. The jaded soldier and statesman could wish for no pleasanter resting-place than these grave highland solitudes which form the backbone of Spain.

The road which leads plainwards from Escorial to Madrid — "that splendid road constructed regardless of cost for the gratification of a royal caprice"—seems now scarce worthy of Macaulay's

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eulogies. Many of the roads to the northward have had to encounter far greater engineering difficulties, and show quite excellent results. Yet this and all other Madrid roads are uniformly villanous; and when they amalgamate they produce the Madrid paving, which is a thing to remember in bad dreams.

The capital itself, however, does not show up badly when approached from the northward; and the Royal Palace which dominates it, on the hill above the Manzanares, is an exceedingly imposing pile. Aránjuez (we were given to understand) considers itself equal to Windsor; but no one of our acquaintance would dare mention Buckingham Palace in competition with the *Palacio Real* at Madrid.

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CHAPTER X

TOLEDO

THERE are but three reasons, that I know of, for anyone visiting Madrid. First, that the roads (which are very bad) lead there; second, that the Prado picture gallery (which was closed) is exceeding magnifical; and third, that there is a bicycle repairer—which is an unsatisfactory reason at best. Smart, well-groomed, busy cities with commodious mansions and boulevards may be found (by such as have need of them) within easier distances than this. And for those who seek old streets, historic monuments, and that delightful aroma of medievalism which is the true inward charm of the Peninsula,—are not the little crooked *calles* of Ávila and Segóvia and Toledo better than all the *carreras* of Madrid?

To them the "Only Court" is no more than a convenient "jumping-off place"; a head office of "Cooks'"; an *entrepôt* of the central roads. The

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Mecca of their pilgrimage lies fifty miles to the southward,—Toledo, the ancient stronghold of the Moor, the Visigoth, and the Roman in the days when none dreamed of such a kingdom as Castile.

The map showed two roads to Toledo, and already I had sampled one of them. "The Illescas road," I argued, "was as bad as possible"; and "therefore the Aránjuez road is the best." My premise had been quite unassailable, yet after all my deduction proved fallacious. More just, and equally logical, was "therefore it has necessarily improved."

The Aránjuez road, to do it justice, starts off with the most admirable intentions; and as if it were really determined to arrive (as it proposes) at Cadiz. But there is a sad slump in its prospects before it has got far on the journey. It becomes stony and bumpy and hummocky, with ruts like the furrows of a plough; and to steer a bicycle along the narrow ribbon of practicable track at the margin is an operation of some nicety, which is not at all facilitated by a heavy side wind. Presently there is a lucid interval of good smooth surface, which lasts just long enough to put the victim into good humour; and the final stage into Aránjuez is like the shingle that is upon the sea-shore.

Such are the habits of a Spanish road; and in a

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way its eccentricities are consolatory. However bad it may be, you can always cherish the hope that it will reform itself altogether round the next turn. There is no reason why it should, but it often does. Of course, "in the alternative" the converse is equally true, but that is a point which needs glossing. Unless you foster a sanguine temperament you will make no progress at all.

I have dwelt at some length on the state of the road, but, indeed, at this stage there is little else to dwell upon. A struggling avenue is pluckily endeavouring to push a line of green pickets across the dun-coloured plain; and here and there are a few miserly olives, each perched upon the little hoard of soil clutched by its hungry roots. But the only things that seem really to flourish are the gigantic six-foot thistles, and I fear that is an ill-omened fertility. It is a greener and leafier world when we descend into the Jarama valley.

Yet those who have heard Aránjuez described as a Garden of Eden in the midst of a desolate wilderness are likely to find themselves somewhat disillusioned by the reality. True, a tree is always a welcome object in verdureless Castile; but the English elms which are the boast of King Philip's oasis, "they grow best at home in the North

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TOLEDO

Bridge of Alcántara, from the Illescas Road.

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Countree"; and though they wear a brave face, they must envy the ample glades and rich green turf which their brethren enjoy in the parks of England. That the much-vaunted palace itself should prove rather a failure need surprise no one. The Spanish nobles are town-dwellers, and a country seat such as Haddon, or Hatfield, or Burleigh, is quite beyond their ken. Aránjuez was a first attempt, and is not the right plant for the soil. Perhaps Hampton Court, enlarged and remodelled in the style of an Alexandra Palace, might convey some notion of its cheap tea-gardeny air: but even the river is uninteresting—a reproach that can seldom be levelled at the Tagus!

I had been cheering my flagging spirits by the anticipation of a nice shady road down the Tagus banks to Toledo: but now an old muleteer regretfully mentioned that the road was dead, and truly it was the spectre of a road to which he introduced me. The ox-carts had been wallowing in it axle deep throughout the winter, and the spring sun had baked it into a chaos of *seracs* and *crevasses* which might have been practicable for a goat. It was wide and straight indeed, and it boasted a noble avenue; but its sole saving feature, from a practical standpoint, was a grassy footpath at the

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side. So long as the avenue continued, the track maintained some semblance of coherency; but when that also defaulted, it frankly abandoned all further interest in life. As a guide it was luckily needless; I had simply to follow the valley, and as there were no walls or hedges I could make a bee-line if I chose. Moreover, on the further side of the river a lofty detached hill, with a ruined castle on the summit, formed a prominent landmark by which to gauge my progress; and with plenty of time before me, I was bound to arrive in the end.

A sympathetic bandit, who found me hauling my bicycle across a ploughed field, dispassionately suggested that I might find the railroad better. This opinion was loyally endorsed by Second Bandit a mile or so to the rearward; and Third Bandit (ever the most practical of the trio) fairly marched me up the embankment and launched me along the permanent way. They were quite right—it was better; but sleepers and ballast are not a desirable cycle track, and my well-regulated English mind revolted against the scandalous impropriety of the whole proceeding. However, it is sheer waste of one's scruples to squander them over the infraction of Spanish bye-laws. They are humoured so long as convenient; but for everything there is

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a season: and nobody dreams of enforcing them if they chance to be inopportune. There was a wayside station to pass before I reached Toledo; there was a train drawn up at the platform, with all the officials *en evidence*, and the passengers, as usual, profiting by the stoppage to indulge in a stroll and cigarettes. I dismounted perforce at the points; but through the station I rode unblushingly: and no one seemed to regard the circumstance as the least unusual or reprehensible. No doubt from Aránjuez to Toledo all bicyclists travel that way.

Meanwhile I had been making fair progress, and my goal was nearly gained. My castellated beacon had dropped out of sight behind me; and in front, at the end of the valley, silhouetted against the western sky, rose the great rocky knoll which is the seat of imperial Toledo. A bend of the river had brought its waters within easy reach, and having washed off the dust of travel, I was indulging in a few minutes' idleness before resuming the road. Suddenly a herd of cattle plashed down into the river a few yards away from me; and their diminutive Corydon—a little brown wisp of humanity in the costume of a second-hand scarecrow—came pattering happily at their heels. An English yokel

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would have been hopelessly flabbergasted by such an unlooked-for encounter; but not so my little Castilian. He bowed, sat down beside me, and launched out into conversation with the most delicious confidence and self-possession, as if it were all the most natural occurrence in the world. He accepted a cigarette with becoming gravity, and made sympathetic murmurs when the matches refused to light. Our final success was acknowledged with a prim little "Blessed be God!" At the end of our chat he escorted me back to the pathway, and made his adieu with a quaint courtliness that conferred a dignity on his rags. Yet probably he had never set foot outside his village, nor set eyes on a stranger in his life. Good manners, like good looks, are sometimes bred in the bone.

Hitherto the valley has been wide and open; but now the river begins to reveal itself in its true character,—*El Tajo*, the Gash,[1]—deep and narrow between its riven walls. Across its path lies the massive granite barrier of the mountains of Toledo. The stream drives squarely into them and recoils

[1] Such is the meaning of the word, but I would not like to vouch for the etymology. The derivation is possibly the other way.

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TOLEDO

The Bridge of Alcántara.

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away sullenly towards the west. But ere it turns it has bitten deep, and a great outlying bastion is held in the hollow of its curve. The sun at his creation shone first upon that rocky dais! The dignity of Toledo demands no meaner site!

It is indeed an ideal situation for a medieval fortress; in plan a rough approximation to the shape of a rather square D. The curved line is formed by the gorge of the Tagus, whose steep, rocky banks would alone be an adequate defence; the straight by the landward face,—also lofty and precipitous, and crowned with the remnants of Wamba's ancient walls. And at the two corners the grand fortified medieval bridges of San Martin and Alcántara throw their lofty arches across the stream. The site is very similar to that of Durham: but the Toledo plateau is larger; and the Tagus is all unwooded, and wilder and grander than the Wear.

The founder, of course, was Hercules. All Spanish cities were founded by Hercules, except a few which had been previously founded by Tubal. No doubt a large man with a club was a somewhat recurrent phenomenon; and the tale of his legendary prowess was the sole evidence of identity that an early Phœnician colonist was likely to

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require. After the Phœnicians came the Romans. But the glory of Toledo first reached its height in the Dark Ages which succeeded the Roman, when the Visigoth dwelled in the land. Toledo was the capital of the Visigothic kingdom; and that kingdom in the day of its power, during the reigns of Leovigild and Wamba, was probably the most potent among all the nations of the West. How dire must have been the consternation of Austrasia and Neustria and Lombardy, when, scarcely a generation later, their protagonist succumbed so utterly before the onset of the Moors!—when the Jews opened the gates of the unwary capital to admit the hordes of Tarik, and the fall of imperial Toledo set the seal on the disaster of Guadalete.

Neither Christian nor Moslem underrated the catastrophe of that fatal Palm Sunday; and the meagre outline of history has been gaudily coloured by romance. Who has not heard the tale of the enchanted Tower of Hercules, wherein the self-willed Roderic sought and learned the secret of his doom? The fascinating Shahrazad won a full night's respite from her dangerous lord by her catalogue of the loot of the "City of Labtayt"—the hundred and seventy crowns of

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TOLEDO

Puerta del Sol.

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pearl and jacinth, the magical mirror, and the emerald table of Solomon!

The Tower of Hercules is no longer alive to testify: but an old Moorish ruin down by the water's edge, under the bridge of San Martin, is still pointed out as the scene of the companion tale. Here the fair Florinda was bathing in the Tagus when her beauty caught the eye of the royal Roderic, and fired the passion which brought unnumbered woes to Spain. It is, indeed, a little hard upon poor Florinda that she should never have been forgiven for her share in the disaster. It was her father, not she, who let loose the Moors to avenge her; and even the legend describes her as more sinned against than sinning. Yet the ballads, which can spare pity for Roderic, have nothing but contumely for her. It is argued, I suppose, that all the trouble arose out of her unbridled passion for bathing. But this is a failing which we northerners regard more leniently. Arletta's ablutions were under a happier star!

During the palmy days of Moslem dominion, Toledo had to yield pride of place to Córdova. But after the fall of the western Caliphate it disputed the *hegemony* with Seville; and it was with considerable equanimity that Mohammed, the

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king of Andalusia, saw his formidable rival grappled by the Christians under Alfonso VI. The author of the *Poema del Cid* bitterly deplores the fact that there was no "sacred bard" to immortalise the chivalrous incidents of that great two years' leaguer; but, at least, the result was satisfactory, and three hundred and seventy years after its capture Toledo was won again from the Moor. Its fall was well-nigh fatal to the Spanish Moslems; for Mohammed himself was now unable to resist the conqueror; and willing to live "a camel-driver in the African deserts rather than a swineherd in Castile," he despairingly summoned the Almoravides from Morocco to his aid. He had sold his kingdom to save it; yet the newcomers beat back Alfonso: and the Cid's newly-won kingdom of Valéncia went under in the flood. But Toledo, once the stronghold of Paynimry, was now the bulwark of Christendom; and against its iron ramparts the wave of Moslem reaction spent itself in vain.

Now began the second period of Toledo's greatness. The city became the seat of the Spanish primate and the favourite residence of the Castilian kings. Some of its importance leaked away southward when Córdova and Seville were reconquered by Ferdinand III. in 1248. But the first great

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blow to its prosperity was the inhuman expulsion of the Jews by Ferdinand and Isabella at the end of the fifteenth century. Toledo had been one of their chief asylums ever since the destruction of Jerusalem; and though Goth and Moor and Christian had all alike persecuted them whenever they became rich enough to make it worth while; yet they were now a numerous colony, wealthy, honoured, and well affected to the crown. But Torquemada's savage fanaticism overbore the scruples of the queen. The whole nation was ruthlessly exiled at a bare six months' notice; and perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that nearly all of them, beggared and hopeless, perished of hardship by the way.

Toledo was still important enough to play the leading rôle in the great revolt of the *Communeros* at the beginning of the reign of Charles V. It was indeed the last city to succumb; and that resolute lady, Maria Pacheco, the widow of Padilla, held it for many months against the imperial forces before she finally abandoned the struggle and fled from the realm. The thoroughness with which this rising was suppressed is perhaps a matter for regret. The triumph of the crown was too complete; and Spain, once the most democratic of

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medieval monarchies, was henceforth an absolute autocracy.

With this last effort Toledo's prominence upon the stage of history comes practically to an end. Henceforth it retired upon its reputation, and let the busy world go on without it as it chose. It still turns out a few of those famous sword blades, "the ice brook's temper," which Othello bore upon his thigh; but, for the rest, it is but a quiet country town, dozing placidly under the *ægis* of the great cathedral, which now seems to furnish its only *raison d'être*.

Nearly a thousand years have elapsed since Toledo was recovered by the Christians; and, though but few of its monuments are of genuine Moresco workmanship,[1] yet to all outward appearance it remains a Moorish city still. The trade-mark of the East is stamped indelibly upon it;—steep, narrow, crooked streets; and square, sombre palaces, whose grim façades give no hint of the lovely *patios* within. Its mazy network of *calles* is spread all over the surface of the great domed rock upon which it stands; and the fact that the

[1] The tiny mosque of *San Cristo de la Luz* is the only genuine Moorish fragment. The *Puerta del Sol*, the church of *Sta Maria la Blanca*, etc., are *Mudéjar* work. Cp. note on p. 208.

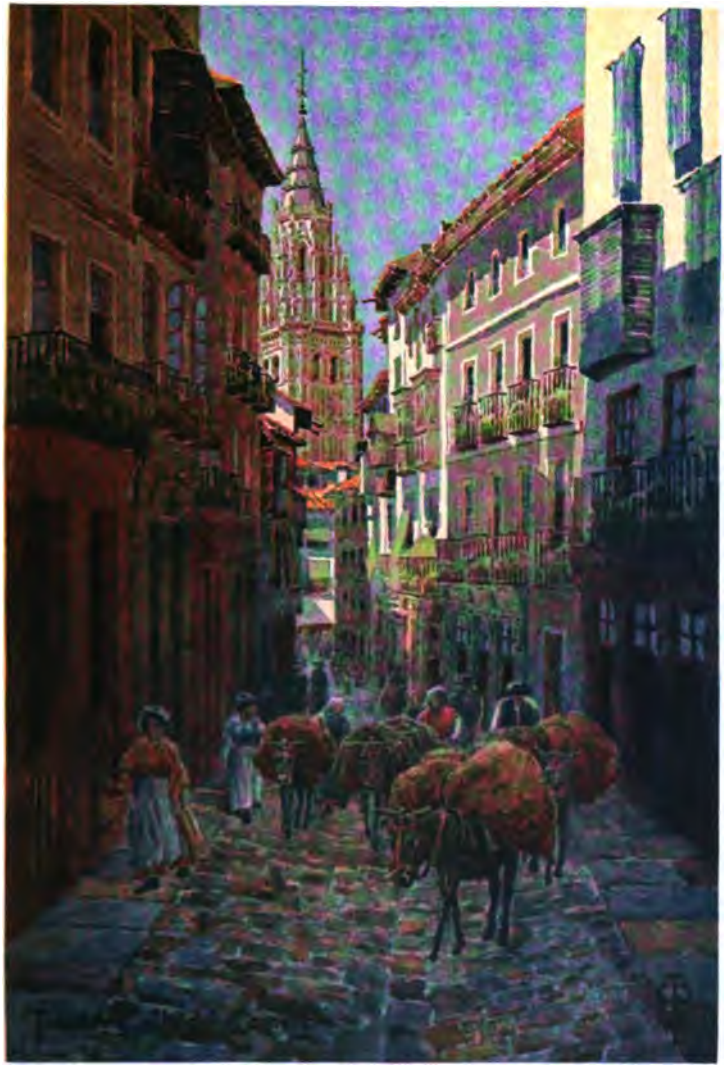
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TOLEDO

Calle del Comércio, with the Cathedral Tower.

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Calle del Comércio is the widest, longest and straightest of any, may serve as some indication of the character of the rest. Street frankly admits that it is one of the few cities where he could not find his way without a guide; and but that I found all ways equally fascinating, it is highly probable that I should have been in the same predicament myself. Every corner of the stage seems still set exactly as it was quitted by the heroes and heroines of Lope de Vega and Calderon. Lazarillo de Tormes might still be town crier. It might be but yesterday that the horrified Gil Blas recognised the comrades of his early escapades walking among the condemned in the procession of the *Auto-da-fé*. One little alley that I discovered in the course of my wanderings bore the remarkable title of "*Calle del Diablo pertinece al Ayuntamiento*," "The-Devil-belongs-to-the-Corporation Street." He does!—to many Corporations! But few are ingenuous enough to proclaim the fact at the street corners! And few have such slight cause to lament it;—he is generally a Devil of Unrest.

The great Alcázar,[1] which is the most prominent object in the city, is too uncompromisingly cubical to be strictly picturesque; and the cathedral, which is its chief glory, is singularly unobtrusive

[1] *I.e.* "Citadel," *Cæsareum*.

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in a general view. The houses shoulder up against it as though anxious to keep it hidden; and when, after much circumnavigation, we do manage at last to unmask it, behold! it is bare and featureless, only redeemed from meanness by its noble western tower.

But the moment we pass the portal all cavilling is awed to silence. Out of the blaze of the southern sunshine we step into a vast, mysterious twilight, lit only by the jewelled pictures in the clerestory overhead. The air is heavy with the odour of incense; and the chant of the canons thunders down the aisles. The style of this great temple is the purest and most solemn of thirteenth-century Gothic. Built by the canonized king, St Ferdinand, out of the spoils of Seville, it is equal to Rheims in majesty, and ranks next to Cologne in point of size. But noble as is the edifice itself, this is but the casket for its nobler treasures. No other Cathedrals in the world can compete with the Spanish in the richness of their furniture; and here, for more than three centuries, the richest of all the great Chapters[1] lavished their wealth upon the adornment of their shrine. The

[1] James Howell in 1620 estimates the annual income of Toledo at £100,000, a sum equivalent to nearly half a million to-day.

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skilfulest craftsmen of the Renaissance,—Copin and Rodrigo, de Arfe and Villalpando, Borgoña and Berruguete,—spent the best years of their lives upon its stalls and *rejas* and *custodias*.[1] They were furnished with gold and silver, jasper and alabaster, with a prodigality worthy of Solomon himself; and we may well apply to them all the boast that is recorded of two of them,—that no one can ever determine who best deserves the palm.

The great masterpieces of the cathedral are concentrated in bewildering profusion about the *Coro* and *Capilla Mayor*; but each and all of the score of chapels that surround it, is stored with relics of history and gems of ancient art. Here lies Alvaro de Luna, the Cardinal Wolsey of Spanish history. The great Constable died on the scaffold in the *Plaza* at Valladolid, and his vindictive enemies would not spare even his tomb; but his beautiful marble monument shows that his daughter's piety was respected in a later reign. Here lies the Grand Cardinal Mendoza, *tertius rex* to the wedded "kings" who made Spain a nation; and his tomb is worthy of a king. Here lie the early monarchs of Castile,—their sarcophagi caught up in the tangle of intricate tracery which encloses the *Capilla Mayor*. And here, among all these

[1] Metal screens and reliquaries.

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kings and princes, are the monuments of two others;—Abu Walid the Moslem, "the good *Alfaqui*" who pled for his persecutors against the wrath of Alfonso VI.; and the humble shepherd of the Morena, who led Alfonso VIII. by the secret pass across the mountains, and died on the plains of Tolosa in the great victory which his guidance gained.[1] "They buried them in the city of David among the kings, because they had done good in Israel." The men of the thirteenth century were no respecters of persons, and could understand an honourable reward.

One of the chapels is specially reserved for the performance of the Mozarabic[2] ritual, the ancient Use of St Isidore, which had been preserved by the Toledan Christians throughout the period of their subjection to the Moors. At the reconquest the Romanizers were anxious to suppress it, and after much controversy the question was referred to ordeal by battle. Two bulls were appointed champions for the rival churches! but the defeat of the Roman representative left his clients uncon-

[1] He has only a statue at Toledo; but his actual grave has a scarcely less honourable site in *las Huelgas* at Búrgos.

[2] The *Mozárabes* were Christians under the dominion of the Moors, as *Mudéjares* were Moors under the dominion of the Christians.

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TOLEDO

The Gorge of the Tagus.

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The Tagus at Toledo.

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vinced, and two knights took the place of the bulls. Again the Toledan was victorious, but again the argumentative Romanists refused to accept the result. The arm of the flesh was a vain thing in such a matter; "the God that answereth by fire, let Him be God!" The protests of the *Mozárabes* were overborne, and the arbitrary bonfire was kindled in the triangular Toledan market-place. The Romanists astutely conceded the privilege of "first go." They complacently watched their antagonists commit St Isidore's precious Missal to the flames. *And, behold, it would not burn!* Had the Romanists kept their heads it might have occurred to them that the old parchment tome, with its thick oak boards and solid metal clasps, was about as unpromising a bit of fuel as mortal bonfire could tackle. But this third defeat gave them a panic. There was only a draw to be hoped for, and they dared not expose their own volume to such an unprofitable risk. With desperate ingenuity they once more tried to revive the controversy from the beginning; but their opponents were now upon too firm ground, and their orthodoxy had to be conceded.

In later years, however, the Mozarabic ritual fell into disuse, and was only rescued from oblivion by

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the enterprise of Cardinal Ximenes, who collated and republished it, and founded the chapel wherein it is still performed. This sounds rather a broad-minded act for a Grand Inquisitor; but Ximenes, an ascetic and a conqueror, a foe to knowledge and a patron of learning, was one of those strange complex characters whose actions seem consistent to no one but himself.

One might readily fill a volume with a list of the glories of Toledo, and not a tithe of its attractions can be mentioned in these meagre notes. Its proximity to Madrid renders it somewhat better known than the majority of Castilian cities, yet most visitors appear to imagine that they can "do" it adequately in a day. A cheerful American whom I met there had come over from Madrid in the morning, and was returning the same afternoon. He was seeing Toledo in three hours, and was spending one of them in dining! A month might well prove insufficient; but a month was not to be spared. One further visit, however, is incumbent on every Englishman. A pilgrimage down the Tagus to the battlefield of Talavera is a duty that he may not ignore.

The Tagus valley becomes more tame and domesticated below the grim defiles of Toledo;

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and its mountain fences, the Sierras of Grédos and Guadalupe, face one another at a distance of some fifty miles. Yet the intervening plains have not nearly the amplitude of the Duero's, though the ground is comparatively open and even comparatively green. It is a very interesting district; for the Tagus was long a frontier river, and its banks were as diligently fortified as those of our own Tweed.

The roads from Madrid and Toledo unite at the castle of Magueda; and it was at the brook beneath it that I made the acquaintance of *El Maestre* Pedro and his wife and family, a couple of Pyrenean bears and a Barbary ape. What an ungainly group they looked as they came scrambling down the road towards me! But they were all true Castilians (at least all the human section), and offered me a share of their food when they stopped to lunch at the water side, as all well-bred wayfarers should:—Would my honour please to eat? "Many thanks! a good meal to your honours!" is the correct reply to this courtesy: and therewith I went my way.

And now the military tourist will begin to recognise that he is approaching a classic neighbourhood. His ear is caught by the names of the

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villages—Torrijos, Sta Olalla, Alcabon. They are humble little hamlets enough, yet their names ring vaguely familiar. They each dropped a card upon history one hundred years ago.

Now, too, the landscape is pervaded by an additional feature, which was likewise important enough to win historical mention on the battle-field.[1] To wit, Pigs. Pigs and pigs and pigs. Pigs by single spies, pigs in battalions. No fat and greasy citizens, like their cousins in England, but sinewy, razor-backed racers of strong sporting proclivities, who rioted along beside the bicycle in sheer exuberance of athleticism. There was a big pig fair toward at Talavera on the morrow, and its votaries were mustering from all points of the compass like the sorcerers of Domdaniel when Eblis summoned them to doom. They were all washed beautifully clean by a tremendous thunder-storm which caught us at the bridge over the Alberche: but the streets and lanes of the city were reduced to an indescribable state.

Talavera de la Reyna lies upon low ground on the right bank of the Tagus, which here is comparatively wide and shallow, and is crossed by a

[1] Several such herds were seized by the hungry regiments in the course of the retreat.

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TALAVERA DE LA REINA

From the banks of the Tagus.

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long and very crooked bridge. The town is not strictly fortified; but it is walled, and well screened by its orchards; and as the plain is here narrowed by outlying hummocks from the mountains, it forms an effective position for disputing the passage of the road.

All the main fighting in the battle took place upon the higher ground to the northward. The town itself, with its enclosures and orchards, was occupied by the Spaniards under their obstinate old Captain-General Cuesta. They had nearly come to grief two days before in retreating across the Alberche, but were now entrenched in a position too strong for assault; and Jourdan and Victor directed all their efforts against the left and centre where the English were drawn up. Here the ground is more open and more elevated, sloping up from the flats by the river till it culminates in the hill of Medellin. The position (as in most other battlefields) does not seem very formidable to a layman. But then any position that did would probably never be attacked.

The battle was one of the bloodiest in the Peninsula; for the British were heavily outnumbered, and their raw militia battalions lacked three years' tempering of the Ironsides of Albuera

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and Badajoz. But what they lacked in warcraft they redeemed in staunchness. For two days and a night they were fighting, and then their assailants sullenly withdrew. Yet, after all, Sir Arthur Wellesley had won merely a tactical victory. His strategic position was too perilous to permit him to garner the fruits. Soult's Galician army corps, already reorganised after the *débâcle* of the Douro, was threatening his rear from Plaséncia; and it was only by an adroit retreat across the Tagus at Arzobispo that he was able to elude the stroke.

One of the minor incidents of the battle was an extraordinary piece of marching. The Light Division, under General Craufurd, was far in the rear at the commencement of the fighting, and were eager to get up before the close. The task was too great, but the attempt was something Homeric. They covered sixty-two miles in twenty-six hours, all in full marching order: and lost but seventeen stragglers by the way! This was probably a record for the Peninsula; though Wellington himself thought that it might be paralleled in India; and some of Marmont's marches previous to Salamanca were not far behind. What manner of men were they who could achieve such feats in July under a Spanish sun?

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CHAPTER XI

A RAID INTO ESTREMADURA

THE Estremadura road launches out boldly from the end of the Segóvia bridge at Madrid, and the fingerpost which points along it laconically observes that that way you will get to Badajos. But quite a lot of water will flow under the Segóvia bridge first, even though it is only the Manzanares which runs there.

Wherefore, to avoid over-watering this narrative, we will not begin it at Madrid, nor even at Talavera, but transport ourselves at one stride right away to the other end of the long line of snowy mountains which guards the northern side of the Estremadura road. Here the Sierra de Grédos ends in a forked tail like one of its own falcons, and between the forks a long, straight valley runs up into the centre of the range. The great snow-peaks sit along either side of that long, straight valley like a Parliament of Gods, with the shaggy

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ilex woods wrapped around their knees; and at its mouth, on a slight eminence half encircled by the new-born waters of the Jerte, stands the ancient city of Plaséncia.

I were ungrateful not to retain a warm corner in my heart for pretty little Plaséncia, for I arrived there limping and dog-wrecked, and Plaséncia was kind to me. But he would be an unimpressionable mortal who could not love her for her beauty alone; and I am not sure that even I—such is man's gratitude—would remember her as kindly had she been less fair. The crumbling walls, the solemn palaces, the quaint old streets and beautiful situation, make this little Hesperian township one of the most charming in Spain. Is she not rightly named "Pleasaunce?" Queenly Segóvia herself need not disdain so fair a cousin.

But Plaséncia should not strictly be included in the Castilian family circle; she has married into Estremadura, and the mountains part her from her kind. The picturesque Estremenian peasantry lounge about her squares and *plazas*, but her site and her buildings seem still to proclaim her kinship. Like other Spanish wives, she has not quite dropped her maiden name.

There is not much traffic in the streets of

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PLASÉNCIA

Puente San Lazaro.

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Plaséncia, neither is much expected. The workmen patching the cathedral roof were heaving over the broken tiles on to the pavement without so much as a prefatory "Heads below!" Yet the place looks far from dead, for the balconies are gay with flower-boxes, and the numerous old palaces still wear a comparatively prosperous air. The cathedral stands right upon the ancient walls, which form a sort of terrace to it upon the southern side. Internally its effect is marred by a transverse partition; but externally, though (like Mr Mantelini's countesses) it has no outline, it is decked with a fanciful miscellaneous finery which makes it inordinately picturesque. Moreover, it is an educational centre, and we are indebted to it for constant processions of demure little students, clad in black cassocks with a burning heart worked in crimson upon the breast. They are beyond comparison the best-behaved children in the Peninsula, and make most appropriate figures in the quiet and shady square.

The *Fonda* where I brought myself to anchor was situated entirely upon the first floor; and this waste of good space was gratuitous, for the ground floor was all empty vaults. My bedroom was at the back. To reach it I had to pass through the

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kitchen; and incidentally to make myself amiable to the cook, who was manipulating her pots over a range of strictly classical construction which might have been imported from Pompeii. Beyond was a tiny *patio* where Maria and the Señora were busy at their household duties under the shade of the vines; and then came my room. There was no window except the glazed upper panel of the door; and no ventilation when the door was shut, so it was usually open. I could shut it without getting out of bed. Our meals were served in the little *comedor* adjoining the kitchen. Maria waited, handing round the viands in their native earthenware pipkins, piping hot from the fire. Also she led the conversation, being a notable authority on all the latest gossip and scandal; and the cook popped her head through the serving-hatch and chimed in volubly at every suitable opening. There is a homeliness about these little hostels which is very delightful; but it is always a puzzle to me how the women get their meals. They seldom dine with their men-folk, and, so far as my observation goes, must subsist entirely on "tasters."

Of course you seldom get a bill. "This is no time o' night to use our bills! With one word of

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PLASÉNCIA

The Town Walls and Cathedral.

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my mouth I can tell them what is to betall."[1] The Señora confined herself literally to one word when I asked her, and responded "thirty-two," but I suppose my face must have betrayed some uncertainty, for "*reals*[2] not *pesetas*!" added the Señora hastily, knocking seventy-five per cent. off my mental calculation, and bringing her charges for full board and lodging down to about three shillings a day. I wonder who was responsible for the libel that Spanish innkeepers cheat; any attempt at overcharging is an almost unprecedented event.

The borderland character of Plaséncia is reflected in its surroundings. The Castilian sierras wall it in upon the east; but away to the west stretches the wilderness of Estremadura—vast rugged moors interlaced with wide belts of olive and ilex, or small rare patches of cultivated ground. The lonely road holds steadily upon its way till it reaches the lip of the Tagus ravine, and then plunges abruptly down to the level of the river.

There is a marked contrast in the scenery along the two great rivers of northern Spain. The

[1] Heywood, *Fair Maid of the West*.

[2] The country people invariably reckon in *reals*—the old coinage. The piece is no longer struck, but its value is one-fourth of a *peseta*.

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Duero valley is wide and tame, a great unfenced expanse of vineyard and cornfield, edged by low hills of petrified earth; but the Tagus rift is narrow and savage, walled in by bare black rock, and showing few traces of the hand of man. The road swings down the hill in admirable style, but startles the traveller by coming to an abrupt and untimely end about half a mile short of the river; and I had to plough my way down through the shingle to the water's edge to prospect for a continuation. Far away up stream a few shattered piers and arches testify to the neglected munificence of some old *Pontifex Maximus* of Toledo; and overhead the great lattice girders of the railway spring from pier to pier across the gulf; but where is there a passage for a wayfaring man? "It strictly prohibits itself" to use the railway line; moreover, the sleepers are laid directly upon the naked girders, so that the passenger gets a fine bird's-eye view of the landscape between his toes; but there is neither ferry nor ford,—at least none where a stranger can see them; and why strain at the strict prohibition if you can swallow the bird's-eye view?

Some little way up the further shore I stumble across the road again. It is getting along capitally, thank you, and tackles the steep ascent in a most

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business-like system of curves and gradients without bestowing a thought upon the lamentable *hiatus* in the rear. Elsewhere one might reprobate such conduct, but here one accepts it as natural. "*Cosas de España*,"—It's the way with Spain.

At the top is a wilderness of rocky pasture powdered with flocks of merino sheep, the great nomad hordes that migrate every winter into these southern latitudes, and are now working their way north again towards the mountains of Leon. Among them stand the cloaked figures of their shepherds, tall and motionless,—a hermit race; and the pale peaks of Almanzor and his brother giants far away in the background, survey with complacent approval a picture as antiquated as themselves. Presently this desert gives way to olive woods, and the olive woods to more cultivated ground. Thick cactus hedges, fringed round with an edging of blossom, begin to hint at a southern climate; and the peasantry are already reaping the barley harvest, though it is yet but the middle of May. At last a cluster of towers planted in the saddle of a low serrated ridge marks the goal of my day's journey, and with a wide sweep to the right, to outflank an intervening valley, I enter the town of Cáceres.

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The tourist who wishes to explore Estremadura will find that the inexorable laws of geography have fixed his headquarters at Cáceres. But he need have no grudge against the inexorable laws aforesaid; they might have chosen a much worse place. To begin with, Cáceres is a town of resources; there is a man in it who owns a bicycle, and who did own till recently a tube of rubber solution, but this rare and costly curio has since been acquired by a foreign collector. Moreover, it is the capital of its province, and it rejoices in a picturesque and busy little market; but the gem of the whole, to an artist's eyes, is the "old town" which crowns the rising ground in the centre, a delightful relic of antiquity all untainted by the contact of to-day.

Nobody seems to go into the old town of Cáceres except the girls with their water pitchers *en route* for the Fountain of Council on the further side. The streets are so steep that they are all stepped, and so narrow that it is impossible for two loaded mules to pass. No sound is heard in them but the clattering of the storks, and the grim old palaces which wall them in have an indescribable air of mystery and romance. I am convinced that any bold spirit who dared to penetrate into their flowery *patios* would find them still inhabited by

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CÁCERES

Within the old Town Walls.

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the old comrades of Cortes and Pizarro and Diego Garcia de Paredes, the great Estremenian warriors of yore. No mere modern mortals can dwell behind those changeless walls. The grey old ramparts which enclose them must have checked the march of time.

Four main roads diverge from Cáceres towards the four points of the compass. That towards the east leads to Trujillo, the birthplace of Pizarro, and the mountain sanctuary of Guadalupe, which the Estremenian conquerors enriched with the spoils of Mexico and Peru. I was scheming in vain to attain to them, but my fate was most resolutely hostile. Two sallies resulted in breakdowns, and at last I reluctantly succumbed. My first successful foray was towards the south.

This road leads over a queer wild country, half common, half moor, sparsely inhabited, and fringed with the low, rugged ridges which are such a feature of the district. It was a notable haunt of robbers a couple of generations ago. Towards the south-east rises the Sierra de Montanchez, which at this point forms the watershed between the Tagus and Guadiana, and the road gradually rises to pass over its tail. The Sierra piles itself up into fine bold masses on the left of the road;

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and beneath it on the further side lies the hamlet of Arroyo Molinos, where three thousand French soldiers, reputed the best in Spain, were surprised and crushed by General Hill in 1811.

Girard was retreating before Hill from Cáceres, and had halted here for the night, leaving pickets along the road to the northward to give warning of pursuit. But the pursuers he dreaded had already outstripped and intercepted him. Hill had followed the parallel road (which is now the main one) and lay unsuspected at Alcuesca, three miles to the south. Not a Spaniard in either village but knew of the intended *coup*; but who would betray it to a Frenchman? And no whisper of his danger reached Girard till the 71st and 92nd regiments swept the street with fixed bayonets in the grey of the stormy dawn. Estremadura was Hill's province, and his other most notable exploit, the seizing of the bridge of Almaraz, was also achieved in this locality. Two victories of which Wellington himself might have been proud.

From the summit of the pass the ground sweeps away to the southward, an ocean of white-flowered cistus bushes interspersed with the vivid yellow of the broom. But this brilliant spectacle does not continue for many miles; it soon gives way to the

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usual jumble of rock and grass and olive; and at last from this stony upland one looks down across the sloping cornfields to the distant Guadiana and the town of Mérida.

A big red-roofed village with no special feature, built beside the broad and sandy bed of a great river, Mérida from a distance looks commonplace enough. Yet the wide, smooth cornfields around it might disclose a different scene. Time was when the garrison of Augusta Emerita was fifteen-fold more numerous than her present population, when her walls were twenty miles in circumference, and even in her decay her astonished conqueror could confess that it was "impossible to enumerate" the marvels she contained. Comparing what she is with what she was, the wonder is not that so much has survived, but that so much has disappeared; and yet in good truth the remains are ample enough, "equal to Rome," say the Meridans, and who should know better than they?

First the great aqueduct (the greatest of three); the bridge of sixty-four[1] arches which spans the Guadiana, and the mighty castle which guards its townward end. The theatre, still almost perfect;

[1] Some call it eighty-one. But this includes some arches of construction in the spandrils, and is not fair counting.

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the ruins of the Temple of Diana, and of the massive Arch of Trajan. The amphitheatre is now but an heap, and the hippodrome can only be traced by its foundations; but the whole soil teems with coins and fragments of pottery, and if ever systematic excavation could be hoped for in this happy-go-lucky country, who can guess what treasures might be revealed? It is at least an encouraging symptom that the Meridans are very proud of their "*antiguedades*," and are always eager to act as showmen; in which capacity they are equipped with the most startling archæological heresies that have ever been foisted upon an astonished world.

It was a hard-worked little room that was assigned to me for my lodging at Mérida. At night I slept there, but by day it was a tailor's shop, and between times it was borrowed by Juanita for the conduct of her little *affaires du cœur*. Its many-sidedness was the result of its situation, for it was on the ground floor, with a large French window opening direct on to the pavement, and guarded with a stout iron grille. To myself this entailed a rather embarrassing publicity, but it just suited Juanita, who could interview her lover comfortably through the bars.

Each night as I returned from the café I beheld

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CÁCERES

Calle de la Cuesta de Aldana.

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the same little picture (it was being produced in replica in half the streets of the town); the moonlight bright upon the *Fonda* walls, and the black cloaked figure clinging like a bat to the rails. I am proud to remember that I always tried to play the game properly, and glided off unobtrusively into a side street before I got near enough to interfere. But I doubt if I ever really escaped observation, for at my next round the pavement would be untenanted, and Juanita waiting at the street door to let me in.

It might be supposed that there was no ostensible motive why she should not have kept tryst at the door instead of the window, or "gone out walking" with her lover as an English girl would have done. But no! that would not be "proper." La Señora Grundy insists upon a barred window. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why all Spanish windows are barred.

"Marriage is honourable to all." But in Spain it is considered expedient to give an elaborately clandestine flavour to the indispensable preliminary of courtship; and during the whole of that period Romeo is officially tabooed by Juliet's kin. He may be a most desirable *parti*, and the bosom friend of all her brothers. But now he is remorse-

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lessly "cut." When they meet, they never see him;—neither (logically enough) do they ever notice that cryptic enigma who is "feeding on iron" at the lattice every evening soon after dark. So matters continue until the courtship has ripened and the happy lover can formally demand his lady's hand. Then he is at once received into all honour and affection, and the lovers are put on a regular footing by being formally betrothed, a ceremony scarcely less binding than marriage itself.

Mérida was my southernmost limit, and detained me somewhat longer than I had intended. But, indeed, the very origin of the city seems to constitute an invitation to repose. First invaded and last subdued of all the Roman provinces, Spain was just witnessing the dawn of her early millennium when Augustus founded this home of rest for the veterans of the final campaign. If rest was his intention, it would rejoice his heart to see how diligently it is still practised by the descendants of his original colonists. But my own sojourn was not entirely voluntary. I had tried once more for Trujillo, and been forced to put back for repairs. Even a fate-compelled idleness, however, may sometimes be found opportune.

The great ruined aqueduct, the headquarters

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MÉRIDA

"Los Milagros," the ruins of the Great Aqueduct.

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of all the storks of the Guadiana, towered over the Cáceres road to the right of me as I again bore away to the northward. It had been the first object to greet my arrival, and was the last to haunt me as I left. The huge gaunt piers and crumbling arches seem more imposing in their ruin even than the complete structure at Segóvia, though I believe actual measurements place the latter first by a short head. "The Miracles," the townsfolk call them; and the title is well bestowed. Yet Estremadura can boast one other miracle more stupendous even than these.

Once more I sallied forth from Cáceres, and set my face towards the west; and surely in all the solitudes of Estremadura there are none more solitary than this. Mile after mile the straight, white road heaves its long line across the ridges of the rolling moor. Its dust is seamed with the trail of the viper, and here and there the eagle hangs poised above his hunting-ground; but other life or landmark there is none for leagues together, till one feels one has been riding there for ever, and will probably continue till the end of time. Sometimes a ruined watch-tower will afford a distant beacon; sometimes a well-ambushed hamlet, whose swine are reputed to develop a specially succulent

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bacon by a strict adherence to a viper dietary. They appear like the phases in a dream, and are swallowed in the immensity of their surroundings. As well seek a pin in a haystack as a homestead in this boundless waste.

If there be any faith in the milestones, Alcántara cannot lie beyond that great purple combe ahead of me. Yet how can there be room for the Tagus valley on the hither side? But even as I am flouting their promise, the road dives gracefully over the lip of an unsuspected hollow, and the fragments of a crumbling rampart resolve themselves into the long-sought town. The gateway admits me to a forlorn and grimy street; the houses are ruinous and neglected; everywhere is dirt and misery and dilapidation. What went ye out into the wilderness to see?

Just beyond the town, and far below the level of the moors, the Tagus has carved its deep and savage glen. Right and left, as far as the eye can reach, the bare bluff headlands stoop down into the abyss like the tors on the Devonshire coast; and at the bottom, pent between its walls of rock, the tawny river swirls down the ravine. All is vast and huge and desolate; the town itself hardly shows in such a picture; yet in the midst one

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object catches the eye which seems to challenge comparison even with nature itself,—the work of Titans rather than men, — THE BRIDGE — *Al Kántarah.*

Spain is the land of bridges. In all Europe they have few rivals, but here they own a King. Since the day when Caius Julius Lacer finished his great work for the Emperor Trajan, and was laid to rest beside it, no other bridge has ever challenged comparison with his;—a work to vie with the pyramids of Egypt, or the Flavian Amphitheatre at Rome.

It is long before the eye can learn to grasp its full dimensions; all around it is rock and mountain, there is nothing to give scale. We are warned of it first by the camera, for the lens will not look at so wide an angle; and then by the size of the archway flung across the road at the centre pier. Presently, as we peer over the parapet into the depths of the gulf below us, we realise that there is a man down there walking by the waterside, and a dog which seems to bark though we cannot hear the sound. Our eye slowly sizes up the *voussoir* above which we are standing; it is a twelve-ton block of granite; and the huge vault with its eighty such *voussoirs* seems to widen and deepen beneath

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us as we gaze; for the brook that it spans is the river Tagus, whose waters have their source three hundred miles away.

Thus hint by hint we have pieced together the astonishing conclusion that the span of each of the two great central arches is rather wider, and nearly as high as the interior of the dome of St Paul's; and that the height of the railway lines above the Firth of Forth is sixty feet less than that of the road above the Tagus! What must the scene be like in winter, when the waters are foaming against the springer stones one hundred and fifty feet above their summer level! How vast the strength of these massive piers which for eighteen hundred years have defied the fury of the floods!

Where now is the great *Via Lata* that ran from Gades to Rome? Where are the famous cities which it threaded on the way? The vine and olive grow in the forum of Italica, and the Miracles of Mérida are a dwelling for the stork. But here at the wildest point of all its wild journey our eyes may still behold a memorial which nature has assailed in vain:—"Pontem perpetui mansurum in sæcula mundi,"—the monument of Caius Julius Lacer, more enduring even than Wren's.

We English, I regret to say, were responsible for

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ALCÁNTARA

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blowing up one of the smaller arches in 1809; and our makeshift restoration,—a suspension bridge made out of ships' cables, probably the earliest introduction of the type to Europe,—lasted till the time of the Carlist wars. Then it was again destroyed, and the Spaniards were long content with a ferry. Now, however, they have restored it in its native granite, a feat of which they are justly proud. Only, seeing that no cement at all was used in the original building, it was really a little too bad of them to insist upon pointing the joints!

It seems rather farcical to make a parade of military secrecy about a structure that has been famous for eighteen centuries; but there is a sentry assigned to it to make sure of preserving its privacy, and I think I acted kindly towards him in providing one culprit for the year. Our re-arrival in the town to interview the *Teniente* created quite a little sensation, particularly as that official was not to be found at his office, and had to be hunted through the parish by packs of importunate boys. The *Teniente* was eventually run to earth in his bedroom, in a state of great deshabille, but as polite as if he had been attired in full court uniform. His house and his goods were at my service, and himself only too anxious to do anything in the world

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to oblige me; but I must not sketch within twenty-five miles of the frontier without a special permit from the Minister of War at Madrid! The travelling Englishman (when not admittedly mad) is always an object of suspicion. But it must be confessed that his vagaries are generally humoured in Spain. He only gets gently restrained in remote and inaccessible places, where the official (never having seen a stranger before) naturally feels it incumbent upon him to do something, but it is not quite certain what. I made no attempt to protest. It would, of course, have been entirely useless; and my Spanish had been already heavily strained in compliments. Moreover, in this instance the *genius loci* had benignantly decreed that I should have got the horse before they locked the stable door.

Meanwhile I had been left some consolation. The bridge is not quite the only lion at Alcántara, and the grand Benedictine convent of its old military monks rises most imposingly upon the edge of the impending moors. It is now ruinous and dismantled, its fine church perfect but empty, and its cloisters used as a cart-shed by the thrifty usurpers of its halls. Beyond this feature, however, the town has little attraction. It was mercilessly

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sacked in the spring of 1809 by General Lapisse,—killed three months later while striving to rally his division during the great assault at Talavera,—and since that crushing disaster it has never had spirit to raise its head. There comes a stage when ruin ceases to be picturesque and becomes only depressing. It is rather in this connection that I remember Alcántara and Sahagun.[1]

It is not altogether surprising, in such an inconsequent country, to discover that by crossing Alcántara you will arrive—Nowhere! and that the only traffic across that stupendous edifice is limited to a few flocks of sheep and some casual mules. I had hoped to return to Plaséncia by way of Cória. It is no great distance. Alcántara is in Cória diocese, and there are no special obstacles beyond the river; but there is no vestige of a road. No, I must return from Alcántara to Cáceres, and from Cáceres to Plaséncia, and from Plaséncia I might find a road to Cória—perhaps. Which is the reason why Cória is now bracketted with Trujillo and Guadalupe as one of the places I hope to see some day. I returned, therefore, to Plaséncia the same way that I had come; and passing round the end of the Sierra de Grédos, took

[1] Cp. p. 55.

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my farewell of these "extrema Durii"[1] from the summit of the Pass of Béjar.

I have since learned that "nothing but a lively historical curiosity, and a keen sympathy with the lonely melancholy of the heaths, could have enabled me to endure with equanimity the privations to which I was exposed."

It is astonishing how little I realised my fortitude at the time.

[1] The province derives its name from the conquests "beyond the Duero" won in the earlier stages of the struggle with the Moors.

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CHAPTER XII

SEGÓVIA

FEW streams are so mercilessly bantered as the hapless Manzanares, and it is rough on an honest little river to rag it because it is poor. It is "navigable at all seasons for a coach and six"; it is mockingly urged "to sell its bridges for water"; and it labours under a gross imputation (not to be whispered in the presence of touchy Madrilenos), that upon one occasion when it happened to be sufficiently copious to float a mule's pack-saddle, the enthusiastic citizens turned out to capture the "whale." Even its few partisans show a calculated *gaucherie* in their compliments. "Duke of streams and viscount of rivers" is quite a preposterous flight. But perhaps the bitterest tribute is the gibe of a jealous young sportsman (a Toledan, and consequently part-proprietor of the Tagus) who had fainted from heat at a bull-fight, and to whom his neighbours were kindly proffering a pitcher of

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water:—"Pour it into the Manzanares," gasped the Spanish Sidney, "it needs it more than I."

No one would have had an ill word to say of it had it clung to its lowlier destiny. It reaps the reward of the tuft-hunting which sent it to visit Madrid. A mile above the Iron Gate it is as pretty and secluded a little brooklet as anyone need desire;—a clean shingly bed, and broken banks fringed with brushwood and poplars, beneath whose shade we very contentedly dozed through the hot hours of siesta-time, cooling our toes in the water and restfully contemplating the distant summits of the Sierra de Guadarrama,—faint opalescent outlines above the tree-tops in the glen. We had ridden in that morning from Toledo; and to push on across the mountains the same afternoon was too heavy a task to be seriously contemplated. No; we would take matters easily during the heat, and drift on in the evening towards the foot of the pass. We should find lodging—of a sort—at some little village *posada*, and could tackle the long ascent in the cool of the early dawn.

The sun was sinking as we passed las Rozas, but there was still an hour of daylight before us, and it seemed a pity to waste such a beautiful evening, so we launched out venturously on to the

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SEGÓVIA

Church of San Miguel.

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moors. At first we had fellow-voyagers;—a homeward ploughman with his yoke of oxen,—a shepherd with his whip—(is there any other region where shepherds use whips?)—and his droop-necked flock earing the ground towards their fold. But soon the dusk won its will, and the darkling track lay empty. The only survivor astir was the habitual belated *arriero*, with his team outspanned for the night and his waggon beached upon the margin of the road. The stars had already begun to flicker up in the heavens, and we could see that Torrelodones, the next village, must be Hobson's choice for ourselves.

At Torrelodones, saith the proverb, are twenty-four burgesses and twenty-five thieves (the twenty-fifth being the curate); yet there is no innkeeper among so many. Bread and wine, however, were forthcoming at one of the cabins, and eggs at a second, which we got cooked at a third; and if anyone wanted to wash himself, was there not the fountain on the village green? Beds, however, were a different matter. A muleteer would have rolled himself up on the floor in his blanket; but we had no blankets, and did not fancy the floor. As for the reputation of the villagers, no doubt that was wholly unmerited; but we thought of

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the fresh air of heaven, and the scent of the clean sweet herbage was borne in to us upon the breeze.

It was already dark when we quitted the hamlet, and the distant lights of Madrid were twinkling up at us from the misty plain below. But another beacon rose in sight as we breasted the surge of the moorland—a large brilliantly-lighted building, apparently right in front of us and only a few hundred yards away. What was it? Evidently no ordinary farmstead—the lights were so many and so small. But anyway it would not do to camp right under its windows, so the question was shelved unanswered. We wheeled aside from the roadway, and picked out a bedroom under the lee of a huge boulder which promised us shelter from the wind.

Anyone who has ever tried the experiment must be perfectly well aware that the delights of an extemporary bivouac are better imagined than endured; but we had not bargained to take our discomfort in exactly the form that it came. The last few nights we had spent at Toledo kicking the last sheets off our beds in a vain endeavour to get reposefully cool.[1] But the boot was on the other leg up here in the lap of the mountains. In vain

[1] *Noche Toledana* is proverbial in Spanish as equivalent to a sleepless night.

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did we empty our knapsacks; we could not get the clothes to keep us warm. About midnight the wind veered. Our faithless boulder no longer gave us shelter; and as we rose to shift our berth, behold, there was that brilliantly lighted building still shining in front of us as steadily as before. What could it be, keeping this night-long vigil when all the rest of the world was asleep? But now the mist had cleared and our eyes had grown accustomed to the starlight, and the true solution of the riddle flashed suddenly across our minds. A dozen miles off at the least, on the further side of the intervening valley, the thousand windows of the Escorial were staring out unwinkingly into the night!

The stars seemed to travel very slowly across the zenith as we dozed through the dog-watches in our chilly nest. But at last a lightening in the east heralded the approach of dawn; and no sooner was there enough light to swear by than we were again upon the road, thankful for the excuse to work some warmth into our shivering limbs. Our teeth fairly chattered as we dipped into the cold shadowy hollows; but the level rays of the rising sun caught us as we topped the ridges, and cheered us with an ample promise of a warm time to come. It was

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not long before our troubles were forgotten, and a big bowl of hot coffee at Villalba sent us to the pass like giants refreshed.

The Puerto de Navacerrada is one thousand feet higher than that of Guadarrama, and the road, being less frequented, is unfortunately not so well kept. But for all that it can be cordially recommended to the traveller, for it boasts far finer scenery as a reward for the extra toil. To our right the shadowy dome of the Great Iron Head cut a bold arc of purple out of the glowing eastern sky, while to our front and left lay the long serrated ridge of the Seven Pikes, a prominent landmark to travellers across the northern plains. The hillsides were draped from foot to summit with the rich purple mantle of the flowering hard-head, variegated with vivid splashes of gold where the broom had ousted its hardier rival; and every here and there the slope was broken by groves of pine, or jutting crags of grey granite, with the cool blue shadows sleeping at their feet. Looking back over our left shoulders along the southern face of the mountains, our eyes were caught by the towers of the Escorial rising up nobly from the lower slopes, and scarcely dwarfed even by their mountain background; while, a little nearer, the Vigo road—a pyramid of persevering

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zigzags—was struggling up the face of the range to reach the Puerto de Guadarrama.

Our own pass rejoices in the possession of a multitude of summits, and the sixth or seventh of these (upon which we had really pinned our faith) disappointed us bitterly by abdicating in favour of another, distant at least an hour away. This last, however, was guaranteed genuine by the inevitable hall-mark of a *caminero's* hut, and was, moreover, on such intimate terms with the Seven Pikes that we felt there was no room for deception.

The gradient of the northern face is distinctly steeper than the southern, and the road zigzags down sharply through the shadowy pine-woods which clothe all this portion of the range. Not a soul crossed our path as we threaded their silent alleys; and the only house is a solitary *Venta* midway down the descent, which rejoices in the ominous title of Mosquito Tavern. We thought of Polonius at supper and did not risk a meal. Deep down in the dingle beneath us a mountain stream was chattering towards the plain; and as we neared the outlet of the valley, and felt that we had broken the back of our day's journey, we began to cast envious glances at the inviting waters.

Our bedroom had not proved altogether a

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success, but our bathroom was worthy of Diana. The clear cold stream gushed smoothly over its pebbly bed, and the pines which thronged its mossy banks spread a green network against the blaze of the noonday sun. A skein of brilliant blue dragon-flies flashed to and fro across the ripples; and at the head of the glade a solitary peak rose clear and sharp against the sky. The beautiful Dorothea cooling her crystal feet in the limpid water was the sole thing lacking to complete the picture. And even she would have been an embarrassment from a practical point of view. How much they miss who travel through Spain by railway, and grumble (legitimately enough) at the difficulty of obtaining baths at their hotels! The wayfarer has happier fortune;—but not an Eresma every day!

At the mouth of the valley stands the royal palace of La Granja, built by Philip IV. as a rival to Versailles. The structure is not nearly so fine, though the site and the fountains are finer. But who goes to Spain to see copies of things French? And we swung disdainfully past the gateway, and headed our course for the great cathedral tower that marks the position of Segóvia.

We were drawing quite close to the city when

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SEGÓVIA

Arco San Estéban.

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we overtook a party of four,—two *carabineros* and two civilians,—sauntering arm in arm along the roadway and amicably sharing cigarettes. But a hideous blight descended upon this innocent idyll when they drew up with us at the *Fielato*.[1] The *carabineros* shouldered their rifles and gave an extra twirl to their mustachios,—the civilians meekly held out their wrists for the handcuffs,—and Law and Order with their miserable captives strutted inspiringly into public view. Evidently Segóvia demanded a certain amount of style, and we two vagabonds eyed each other dubiously. But the Eresma had given us a "clean slate." No one would have guessed from our looks that we had spent the night in the open and ridden across the mountains since the dawn. "Nevertheless," quoth one of us sententiously, "what with the bad night, and the early start, and the long ride, and the hot sun, and the bathe, and the pine-woods, and the *comida* which we are going to eat, I expect there'll be more *siesta* than sight-seeing for us this afternoon."

There are a certain number of towns in Europe which form a class by themselves—a class of professional models for the delectation of the artist.

[1] The *Octroi* office, to receive the city tolls.

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They do not necessarily possess the most interesting monuments, but they are blessed with a certain genius for assuming graceful poses, for wearing harmonious colours, and framing themselves into pictures from whatever point they are viewed. They are a very select company,—even Florence and Nuremburg can scarcely be included,—but Venice is one, and Bruges, and Rothenburg-a-Tauber; and Segóvia ranks with them.

The principal lion of the city was lying in wait at the gates thereof,—the huge granite Aqueduct, one of the wonders of Spain. Its mighty piers go striding like colossi across the valley, and the little puny houses "peep about under their huge legs." By whom it was built is a matter of some question; possibly by Augustus,—more probably by Trajan[1]; so at least say the learned, who are wofully wrong-headed about such things. The true story is that it was erected by the Devil in a single night, out of his love and affection for a fair damsel of Segóvia, to save her the trouble of going down the hill to draw water. Her townswomen unto this hour are profiting by her sumptuous love-token. But her poor suitor was not so

[1] Trajan was a Spaniard born, and his reign an extremely prosperous period for Spain.

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fortunate. His Delilah found one stone a-missing, and took advantage of the flaw to repudiate her contract.

Beneath its broad shadow we dived in among the crazy patchwork houses of the *Azoquejo*, the once disreputable "Little Market" where Don Quixote's rascally innkeeper had been wont to "practise knight-errantry" in his callow days. A steep crooked street led us up under the toppling balconies, past the beautiful Romanesque arcades of the Church of San Martin, and the heavily rusticated façade of the sombre Palace of Pikes. Truly this was a captivating city; we made the confession immediately. And as yet all the grounds of our verdict were a few steps inside the back door.

Segóvia is Queen of Castilian cities, as Toledo is the King of them. But Segóvia does not lend her countenance to those who approach from the south. She sits with her face to the northward towering over the road from Valladolid:—an unforgettable vision, the fairy city of our dreams.

Spain seems to take a delight in concentrating her fascinations. For mile after mile she will trail you over a dull and spirit-quelling country, till all your enthusiasm is properly subdued. Then she

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will suddenly overwhelm you with a whole cargo of accumulated perfections, an extravagance of beauty which leaves admiration aghast. And never was *coup de théâtre* more artfully developed than this great spectacle of Segóvia. A far-distant glimpse of a little group of turrets bristling upon the base of the mountains at the foot of the Seven Pikes; a tardy approach up the valley of the Eresma, whose trees and rocks impede all further view. The valley becomes a trench; and a vision of towers and cliffs begins to stir our anticipation; while the trench narrows down to a gullet, with sides so straight and smooth that they might have been cut by hand. Then comes a sudden turn; the rock gates swing wide open, and all in a moment the marvel stands revealed.

Perched upon the precipitous cliffs of a long wedge-shaped promontory between two confluent gorges, Segóvia has been aptly likened to a ship stranded sidelong on the mountains with its bows slanting towards the plain. The sharp prow and lofty forecastle are formed by the heights of the *Alcázar*; a little further aft is the "bridge,"—the high ground round the *Plaza Mayor*, where stands the cathedral, the central feature of the whole. And if one is to run the comparison to

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SEGÓVIA

The Alcázar

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death, I suppose the funnel would be represented by the cathedral campanile, and the stern galleries by the aqueduct arcades. The likeness is undeniable, but altogether too prim and pedantic. As well might one picture a fairy in a tailor-made costume.

There is something almost life-like in the sweep of the tilted strata as the great cliff leaps above the summit of the poplars. It seems like the "station of the herald Mercury";—arrested motion rather than repose;—a great wave petrified in the act of breaking, with spires and gables for the spray upon the crest. Beneath it curves the green and fertile valley, the "terrestrial Paradise" of the Monks of El Parral[1]; and the richness, brilliance and daring of the whole wonderful composition form a theme which is the despair both of pen and pencil alike.

The *Alcázar*, which is poised upon the extremity of the precipice, was gutted by fire some forty years ago, and is consequently largely a restoration; but it harmonises so admirably with the lines of nature that one hardly realises that it has not grown of its own accord. It has always been a royal stronghold, but never played any very important part in the

[1] "The Vineyard," a lovely dismantled monastery planted beside the Eresma, just underneath the town.

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tumultuous drama of Spanish history; our friend the enemy, with commendable discretion, having commonly preferred to gather his laurels from some less inaccessible bough. It has, however, attained a minor celebrity through the carelessness of a nursemaid. This sounds but a threadbare method of achieving greatness; but the girl who accidentally dropped an heir-apparent out of a window of the *Alcázar* at Segóvia must be allowed to have fixed the standard at the very highest conceivable peg.

But the proudest day in its annals was that upon which Isabella the Catholic (newly apprised of the death of her brother King Henry) rode forth from its gateway to claim the homage of Castile and Leon. The moment was critical, for her succession was disputed; but Segóvia stood firmly in her favour,—a worthy birthplace for the worthiest era of Spain. The site seems designed for such a pageant; but it bore its own bane in the setting: for from the little convent of Sta Cruz, below the gateway of San Estéban, Torquemada was drawn to sway his nobler Queen.

Torquemada was Isabella's evil genius—the demon who was to turn all her blessings to a curse. It is but just to him to admit that he was honest in

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his wrong-headedness; that he believed as sincerely in the wickedness of an unauthorised conscience as in the righteousness of persecution, and would have gone to the stake himself in support of his tenets with as much resolution as any of his victims. It is the standing puzzle with such men how they could fail to recognise in their own spirit the condemnation of their own methods. Persecution they would have derided if applied to them by others. Why should they credit its efficacy when applied to others by them? And an even saner thought they might have gleaned from the old essayist[1]:—"When all is done it is an over-valuing of one's convictions by them to cause that a man be burned alive."

The cruelty for which we chiefly condemn them is a crime for which they were not wholly responsible. The age was cruel,—"the most cruel of all ages," wrote the grave Montaigne:—and the Inquisition did but deal with heresy as treason was dealt with by the State. Its secrecy was its new and horrible feature and the one most deeply resented at the time.

For at first, even in Spain, the Inquisition was not tamely accepted; and some of the noblest

[1] Montaigne.

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churchmen were loudest in its rebuke.[1] It sinned against the light. It was a thing of devils; an atrocity only to be paralleled by the witch-doctors of Ashanti and Benin.

These grisly reflections are the inevitable Nemesis of all romantic and chivalrous associations; but they seem as sadly out of place in this sunny Eden as the trail of the serpent in its prototype. Isabella was a generous patroness to the little convent, and her own mottoes and badges figure in its delicate carving. She needed no such piety to keep her memory green.

The Valladolid road skirts the foot of the precipice on the larboard side and doubles back into the city, where the slope is easiest at the stern. But the straight path is taken by an irresponsible little bye-way, which rushes the steep ascent along the feet of the beetling ramparts, and succeeds in winning a footing inside the Santiago gate. Here the elegant horse-shoe arches look as if they might have been borrowed from the Alhambra; and as we issued from under their shadow we were confronted by the graceful campanile of the Church of San Estéban, a work of the thirteenth century,

[1] *E.g.* Talavera, first Archbishop of Grenada, and Peter Martyr, the Confessor and Biographer of Isabella.

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SEGÓVIA

Arco Santiago.

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and unique in Spanish architecture, though it may be mated in Provence. *Were* confronted, alas! for I fear it now stands no longer. The tower was badly cracked when first we saw it, and on the occasion of my second visit was being taken down as dangerous. As to its ultimate destiny it is quite impossible to prophesy: but Spaniards are capable restorers should they happen to think it worth while. It may be as reverently revived as the work at Leon Cathedral, or (*Di meliora!*) razed with as little compunction as the late leaning tower at Zaragoza.

The gateway of San Estéban is a little abaft the church, and, like its neighbour of Santiago, has distinctly a Moorish air. Not so the Arco San Andres, the other great gate, to the starboard. That is uncompromisingly Gothic, and large and massive enough to balance both the other two.

Upon this side the city is bounded by the little bourn of the Clamores, a scantier stream than the Eresma, but equally romantic and picturesque. It flows in a straight-sided gully like a natural moat, the upper reaches beeoming gradually shallower and wider till they expand into the broad valley which is crossed by the aqueduct arcade. Here the most prominent feature is the cathedral, which

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surges up out of the medley of houses, overtopping even the pinnacles of the *Alcázar*. It is the latest important Gothic monument ever erected upon Spanish soil, a sister church to the new cathedral of Salamanca, and, like it, of imposing and elegant proportions, though its details are less elaborately ornate.

We are far from exhausting the subject, but it is vain to continue the catalogue. The true fascination of the town must be felt and not described. I am afraid that even the Segóvians are not fully appreciative; for our host considered that we were wasting our time there, and wished to pack us off to la Granja to see the fountains play. "It was a shame," he said, "to spend every day in Segóvia." Segóvia!—where every street corner is worth a wilderness of fountains!

When Gil Blas was imprisoned in the "tower of Segóvia," his kind-hearted gaoler assured him that he would find the view from his window very fine—when he cared to look. This casual remark gains significance from the fact that it is about the only allusion to scenery in all that veracious biography.[1] For any hint to the contrary the

[1] The beautiful *Huerta* of Liria is the only district actually praised.

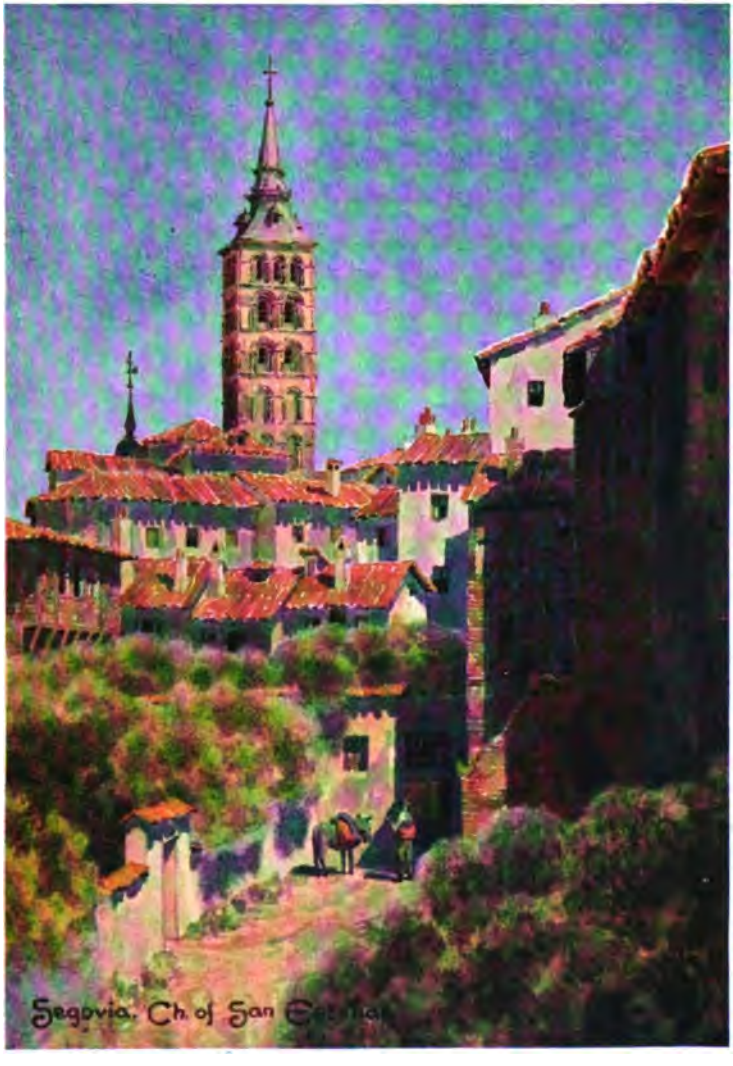
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SEGÓVIA

Church of San Estéban.

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Cantabrian mountains might be mole-hills, and Grenada itself as commonplace as Valladolid. Le Sage dealt with men, not with scenery, and no doubt, like Dr Johnson, would have preferred Fleet Street; but Segóvia wrings a tiny tribute even from him.

Gil Blas, it may be remembered, was not impressed by the prospect. He had a very bad fit of the blues, and could only observe that there were nettles by the stream. But doubtless he saw better ere leaving. His character (never much to boast of) was at least vastly improved by his involuntary sojourn, and perhaps it is not too fanciful to suggest that "the view from the window" may deserve some of the credit of the cure.

"There are none of beauty's daughters with a magic like thee," sings Byron to one of his *houris*; and the same whole-hearted allegiance to Segóvia will be paid by most of those who have once come under her spell. Grenada, perhaps, may equal her. So does Albarracin, in tertio-decimo: and the situation of Cuenca is probably the grandest of all. But even Grenada herself will not steal her admirers from Segóvia; and Cuenca, for all its brilliance, is a gem of fewer facets than this.

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CHAPTER XIII

BÚRGOS

LAST but not the least among the merits of Segóvia is to be reckoned the fact that it pays some attention to its roads, for these are decidedly the best in all the central provinces. No doubt they owe something to their proximity to the Sierra de Guadarrama, which supplies them with their granite metalling, and even vouchsafes them an occasional shower. Yet there is a balance of credit to be shared among the worthy *camineros*,—those humble "pawns" who are posted at long intervals along the roadway (each with his donkey and his dog), diligently trimming the margins and spreading the tags of herbage over the surface of the road. The method seems somewhat original, but at least it has the merit of success; for the scraps of turf serve to catch the dews at night-time—and moisture is the chief desideratum upon every Spanish road.

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The wide tawny plains which spread themselves northward from Segóvia are chequered with mighty pine-forests, the homes of solitude and shade. These rich green masses form a striking contrast to the bare red earth around them, and the pale blue of the distant mountains which show faintly upon the horizon beyond. For miles at a stretch the road burrows through these colonnades of tree-stems,—all plentifully blazed for resin, and festooned with the little earthenware pipkins in which it is collected; —and seldom indeed is either man or beast encountered to give a touch of life to the shadowy depths around. At one point we passed a venerable *padre*, faithfully conning his breviary as he trudged behind his mule; at another a small brown damsel lording it over a herd of gigantic kine. But the only other living creature was a large snake dusting itself in the roadway, over whom we narrowly escaped riding, for we were right upon him before we saw what he was.

Once clear of the pine-belt, the country quickly relapses into the monotony typical of the Duero vale. One may partly avoid it by taking the road to the eastward, and making straight for Búrgos by Sepúlveda and Aranda de Duero across a region of wild and lofty moors. But of the two roads to

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Valladolid there is little to choose between Olmedo and Medina del Campo, and we may as well follow the more direct.

It is easy to understand, as we cross these great limitless levels, in what manner the Moors were so long able to maintain their supremacy against the hardier races of the North. The whole district is an ideal battle-field for the light-armed cavalry in which their strength consisted; and to set a medieval man-at-arms, cased in full panoply, to do a hard day's fighting under that roasting sun is a conception worthy of Perillus himself. The battles with which History concerns itself, however, are of a later age. The disconsolate little walled town of Olmedo (once one of the keys of Castile) has given its name to two desperate conflicts in the interminable civil wars which ravaged the peninsula in the middle of the fifteenth century. Here it was that Alvaro de Luna[1] gained his great victory over his confederate enemies in the reign of John II. Here, too, in the following reign, was fought a bloody fratricidal action between Henrique IV. and Alfonso, the brothers of Isabella the Catholic.

On the eve of this latter battle, Archbishop Carillo of Toledo[2] (as usual "agin the government")

[1] Cp. p. 207. [2] Cp. p. 151.

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sent a courteous message to his special enemy, the king's favourite, apprising him that forty knights had bound themselves by an oath to fight neither with small nor great, but only with him, the following day. Don Beltran de la Cueva, however, though he might not deserve his honours, at least knew how to wear them gallantly. He countered by remitting a full description of his horse and armour, so that the forty knights might make no mistake;—rode into battle as advertised;—and escaped unscathed. His spirit deserved no less:—perhaps even Carillo thought so. But one would like to know what became of the forty knights.

Olmedo figures also in fiction, but not in so martial a vein. Hither, in fear of his life along the road from Valladolid, fled our old friend Gil Blas—ex-assistant to Dr Sangrado—with more murders on his conscience than even that seasoned article felt quite easy under, and the avenger of blood at his heels in the shape of an enraged Biscayan. We followed the track of his agitated *Hegira*, but, of course, in the reverse direction, dropping gradually down to the level of the Duero by a bare and undulating road. The broad river-basin looks comparatively green and well-wooded

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when viewed from the heights above Simancas; yet as one crosses it, it is arid enough; and the steep, flat-topped hills which bound it seem absolutely Saharan, whether looked at from above or below. The Duero itself at this point flows in a trench between crumbling yellow banks; and the village near it, where Gil Blas struck up acquaintance with the barber and the strolling actor, lingers in our memory as the scene of our most decisive victory over our enemies the dogs. Our pockets were fairly bulging with ammunition as we descended into the *mêlée*, and whatever we missed on the volley seemed fated to catch the *ricochet*. Our last missile was expended absolutely at random on the sound of a dog behind us. But to judge from the yell which followed it, it was none the less effective for that.

Valladolid has the general unfinished air befitting a town that has made several unsuccessful attempts to establish itself as a Capital; and its failure to support that dignity is perhaps less surprising than the fact that it should have been cast for the *rôle*. It stands upon no important river, on no commanding hill. There is hardly a village in the plain around it but might equally well have drawn a prize in the lottery which decreed its eminence.

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BÚRGOS

Arco San Martin.

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In strategical position it is inferior to Búrgos—to Toledo in historical prestige.

Its memories, too (even apart from Dr Sangrado), are none of the most cheerful; for it was one of the chief seats of the dreaded Inquisition, and no city save Seville can boast a blacker fame. The wretched Jews and Moors fill up the roll of the *Quemadero*,[1] but there were many scholars and nobles among the victims of the *Plaza Mayor* at Valladolid. Here died the noble San Roman, the first of the Spanish reformers. His ashes were collected by the very soldiers that guarded his pyre and were brought to London by the English Ambassador,—a foretaste of evil to come. Here it was that Don Carlos de Seso, his limbs mangled by torture and disfigured by the ghastly *San Benito*, paused as he passed the royal daïs, and sternly demanded of Philip, "as one gentleman of another," how he could have the heart to tolerate such atrocities in his domain. "I would slay mine own son were he as thou art," was the bigot's answer. And so, to do him justice, he would;—on even less provocation;—as a certain grave in the Escorial can testify unto this day. But surely even Philip's conscience can not have

[1] The place of execution at Seville.

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been appeased by such a rejoinder. The memory of that awful indictment must have haunted him years afterwards in the long terrible days when he was himself meeting a yet more hideous death with equally resolute fortitude.

There was one at least of the judges who sickened at his share in that day's butchery: for when, many years afterwards, Carranza, Archbishop of Toledo, himself fell under the suspicion of the Holy Office, the remorse which he felt for de Seso was imputed to him for a crime. And the spirit which such a man could inspire in his fellows may be judged from young Julian Sanchez, who suffered the same day. The flames burnt the cords which bound him, and in his agony he wrenched himself free. The friars sprang forward to hear his recantation. But Julian's eye fell upon the heroic figure of his leader, still steadfast amid his sufferings, and with the cry, "Let me die like de Seso!" he flung himself back into the flames.

Nowhere in Europe had Protestantism nobler martyrs than the Spaniards: and numbers of them were men of eminence; for their very judges lamented that the learned men whom they had sent to confute foreign heretics were returning to preach the faith which they were commissioned to

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destroy. But against such persecutors their cause was hopeless. Philip and Valdez were men with hands of iron.

Valladolid has many fine monuments, but they are scattered and lost among newer and less interesting surroundings. Even the old arcaded *plaza* is becoming deplorably modernised; and the old-world charm of Toledo and Segóvia may here be sought in vain. The Pisuerga river (upon which the city stands) forms the eastern boundary of the *Tierra de Campos*, as the Esla forms the western.[1] And the scenery of the two valleys is so nearly identical that a traveller dropped unexpectedly in either might be puzzled to say which. There are the same wide basin, the same crumbling yellow cliffs, the same troglodyte villages, the same Nilotic-looking stream. The only speciality of the Pisuerga is the extreme dustiness of the roads.

Dueñas is one of the most typical little towns of the district. Perched in full sunshine on one of the bare hills that flank the valley, it looks as thoroughly baked as a pie-crust, in spite of the poplared meadows at its feet. Here Ferdinand and Isabella first started their housekeeping, on a very modest scale indeed, with scarcely enough

[1] Cp p. 132.

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capital to guarantee to-morrow's dinner. "Saving a crown, he had nothing else beside," sings the Scottish lassie of her suitor in the old ballad. But the royal lovers' crowns were still in abeyance; and the then wearer of the Castilian diadem had very different matrimonial plans for his high-spirited sister. Wherefore he, whom History remembers as the austere and politic Ferdinand, stole secretly across the hostile frontier, disguised as groom to his own attendants, at the imminent risk of a broken head; and the knot was safely tied in the cathedral at Valladolid, with the connivance of a few of Isabella's staunchest partisans.

The little cathedral town of Paléncia lies a little off the direct road; but it is most conveniently situated as a half-way house to Búrgos. The cathedral is a singularly fine one, though rather ramshackle externally; and, like a true Spanish cathedral, it is crammed with works of art. The streets are all quaintly colonnaded; but we were somewhat taken aback when we were shown the entrance to the *Fonda*, a miserable rat-hole in a blank and dirty wall. We had expected something better of Paléncia:—yet nothing quite so good as the delicious shady *patio* which we found at the end of the passage; for the hotel is

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DUEÑAS



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really an excellent one, and its true entrance is from a street at the back. On the whole, we have nothing but commendation for Paléncia. Only we wish that the little sisterhood, "*Siervas de Maria, ministras para los enfermos*,"[1] would mind —not their p's and q's, but their m's and n's. A little ambiguity in the final syllable is so extremely compromising!

We quitted Paléncia early on midsummer morning, and soon regained the Búrgos road. The villages that lay before us were vomiting such volumes of smoke that we concluded Torquemada must be justifying its title by the celebration of an *Auto-da-fé*. But it proved to be only lime-kilns; and Torquemada is pretty enough to deserve a gentler name. Here the Pisuerga is crossed by a long crooked old bridge; and in the fields near by occurred the incident which forms the subject of Pradilla's famous picture, when poor mad Juana, escorting her husband's body from Búrgos to Grenada, elected to spend the night in the open sooner than shelter the faithless corpse in a convent of nuns. An incident worthy of Lear!

Now we deserted the Pisuerga to follow the

[1] The ambiguity would not be apparent to a Spaniard. To him *Invierno*, "Winter," is the assonym to *Infierno*, "Hell."

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Arlanzon, a greener and narrower valley, though still somewhat dreary at times. The poppies were blazing in the brilliant sunshine with a splendour that dazzled the eye. They grow best where blood has been spilled, if we are to credit old folklore; and the Arlanzon valley may well bear out the assertion, for every stage in the journey—Torquemada, Quintana del Puente, Venta del Pozo—was the scene of some fierce skirmish during Wellington's retreat from Búrgos in 1812. His army suffered terribly hereabouts; for the roads were wellnigh impassable in that rainy autumn, and the sulky troops broke out of all control. At one time there were twelve thousand of them all drunk together in the wine-vaults at Torquemada! The result was almost disaster. But fortunately the stock of wine was a large one, and they left enough for the French. It may be urged in extenuation that the country vintages are more heady than one would think, especially for exhausted and starving men.

Our own difficulties arose not from rain but from sunshine, and the last few miles over the hilly ground were distinctly exhausting. But at these high levels even the sultriest sun is tempered by a crisp and bracing air. The traveller who starts early can

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BÚRGOS

Hospital del Rey.

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generally ride out the morning, and the leafy avenues of Búrgos were our haven at mid-day.

Búrgos shows itself off at best advantage when seen from the eastern side, but the approach from the west is not unworthy of the Capital of Old Castile. First we pass the beautiful *Plateresque*[1] gateway of the Hospital del Rey. Then the towers of Las Huelgas, the most famous Nunnery in Spain. The convent was founded by Alfonso VIII.,—a trespass offering after his great defeat by the *Miramamolin*[2] at Alarcon. And his atonement was accepted; for twenty years later he was able to hang up over the High Altar the sacred banner captured at Las Navas de Tolosa, the great victory which extinguished for ever the long domination of the Moor.

Under its folds the young Prince Edward of England knelt watching his arms on the eve of his knighthood in 1254. Here he was married — a boy bridegroom — to his girl-bride, the Princess Leonora of Castile; and hence he carried her away with him to his home in his northern

[1] The "Silversmith style," or early Spanish Renaissance. So called from the Cellini-like carving which is its leading characteristic.

[2] The Emperor of Morocco; at this time the martial Yakub aben Yussef.

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island, where as the "dear Queen" of the Eleanor Crosses her name is held in honour to this day.

"Laws go as Kings wish," says the Spanish proverb; otherwise it is difficult to imagine how the nuns could have ever permitted such a shocking thing as a wedding in their own Conventual Church. When we peeped into it, the very effigies of the kings on the royal tombs were jealously shrouded — for propriety's sake! Formerly ten thousand dollars dowry and sixteen quarterings were indispensable to the lady who wished to renounce the vanities of the world in this exclusive cloister! But now the sisterhood is sadly reduced, and takes in "paying guests,"—to wit, another sisterhood, with whom they live (it is said) in peace and amity. I mention this because an old French curé, who visited the convent with us, seemed to regard it as the most astounding miracle that Búrgos had to boast.

The main entrance to the city is formed by the magnificent Arco de Sta Maria at the head of the bridge over the Arlanzon. It was erected to propitiate Charles V. after the revolt of the *Communeros*; and that monarch's effigy consequently occupies the most conspicuous niche. He is surrounded by all the local heroes of Búrgos;—

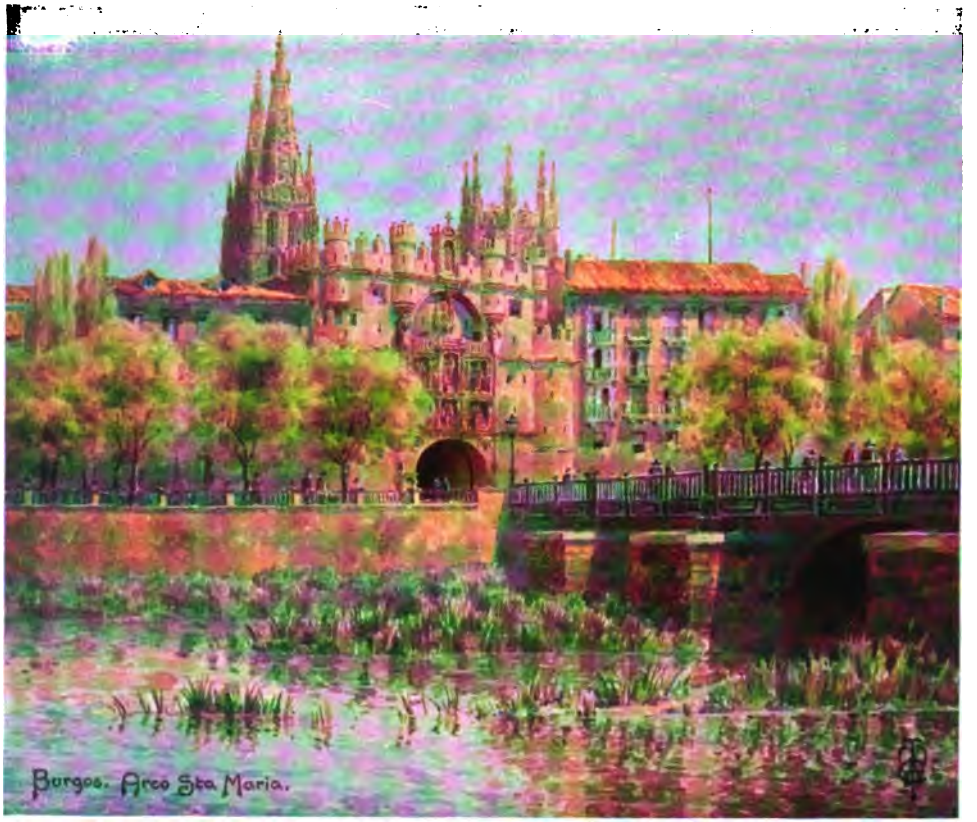
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BÚRGOS

Arco Sta Maria.

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Diego de Porcelos, *Fundator noster*, whose German son-in-law erected the *Burg*,—Lain Calvo, chief of the early "Judges,"—and Fernan Gonzalez, the great count who founded the kingdom of Castile. But of course the greatest of all the city demi-gods is their "Champion Chief," my Cid Ruy Diaz of Bivar. Doubtless he would have been their patron saint if the Pope could have been induced to canonize him;—a queer type of saint perhaps;—but there are queer types in the Calendar.

"My Cid" flourished about the time of our Norman Conquest, and from his youth upward was recognised as the doughtiest warrior in Spain. He was the sword-arm (according to legend) of three successive Castilian sovereigns; and his services culminated in the conquest of Toledo, where (again according to legend) he was commander-in-chief. Afterwards he fell into disgrace;—chiefly owing to his invincible ignorance of the dogma that you ought to stop killing Moors as soon as your king has made peace with them; and Alfonso VI. arranged the difficulty by banishing him from Castile,—to kill more Moors. "My Cid" now obtained letters of marque (or their equivalent) from the Moorish King of Zaragoza, and proceeded to carve out a kingdom for himself by the conquest

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of Valéncia. This enterprise required money, and "My Cid" raised it from the Jews, leaving in pawn a sealed chest full of gravel, which purported to contain his family gems. Apparently he was indignant with the Hebrews because they would not accept his bare word; and it never occurred to either party that they were, in fact, accepting his bare word in the matter of the sealed chest. As a commercial transaction it seems a little bewildering; but it all came right in the end; and "My Cid" loyally redeemed his chest of gravel at full face value when Valéncia was subdued.

At Valéncia he reigned in great glory, reconciled to the king and victorious against all assaults of the Moors. There he made an edifying end, serenely indifferent to the gathering of the mighty host which his foes were assembling for their final effort. Thence he sallied for the last time at the head of his comrades,—a ghastly figure, stiff in death, but clad in full armour, and mounted on Bavieca, as he was wont to ride of yore; and all the Moors that beleaguered him fled at the sight of him, so that the spoil that he took at his death was more than he had ever taken in his life. Ximena, his widow, bore back his body to Búrgos, as he had bidden her; and his bones are exhibited

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to inquisitive strangers in the Town Hall at a *peseta* a head! How could the Burgalese have the heart to ravish them from his own monastery of San Pedro de Cardena, where he slept with Ximena and Bavieca, like the tough old Berseker that he was?

Of all the cities of Northern Spain, Búrgos is probably the best known to the average tourist; but though the English language (for which one acquires a very keen ear after a month's abstinence) may be occasionally heard in the environs of the cathedral, yet the quaint old *calles* and palaces are still much less visited than they deserve. Many of the latter are particularly fine examples of their class, especially the stern old *Casa del Cordon*, which takes its name from the great cord of St Francis, sculptured over the portal,—a common embellishment in the palaces of that date; and the more graceful *Casa Miranda*, built (as we may surmise) by some relative of the "prudent" Don Diego, Don Quixote's hospitable host. This last is a lovely old building of Italian delicacy of ornament, but, now, alas! sadly mutilated and partitioned off into squalid tenements, not entirely innocent of fleas.

"It is never hot at Búrgos," we had been told

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by a friendly mentor: and I can testify that it is often cold there, for the place stands high, and the mountains of la Demanda rear their snowy crests at no great distance away. Yet the local saying, "Nine months of Winter, and three of H—l"[1] is distinctly a more impartial summary, and this month was apparently one of the three. The narrow streets blazed white and scintillating under the flood of sunshine. The wayfarer edged his way gingerly along the shady margin, and picked out the narrowest point before he would venture to cross. Then, after a timid pause, he would draw a deep breath and make a bolt for it. The sun caught him in transit like the blast from the mouth of a furnace; and he scuttled gasping into shelter, and cooled off on the further side. The Spanish shade temperature may perhaps be matched on a hot day in England, but it needs the *Piazza* at Venice to rival the fury of the sun.

There are, indeed, some few Salamanders who do not appear to mind it. A party of tonsured Franciscans were unconcernedly challenging it to do its worst. But most of the saner inhabitants wisely keep indoors till the evening; and whoso wishes to see Búrgos Society taking its airing, let

[1] Cp. note on p. 265.

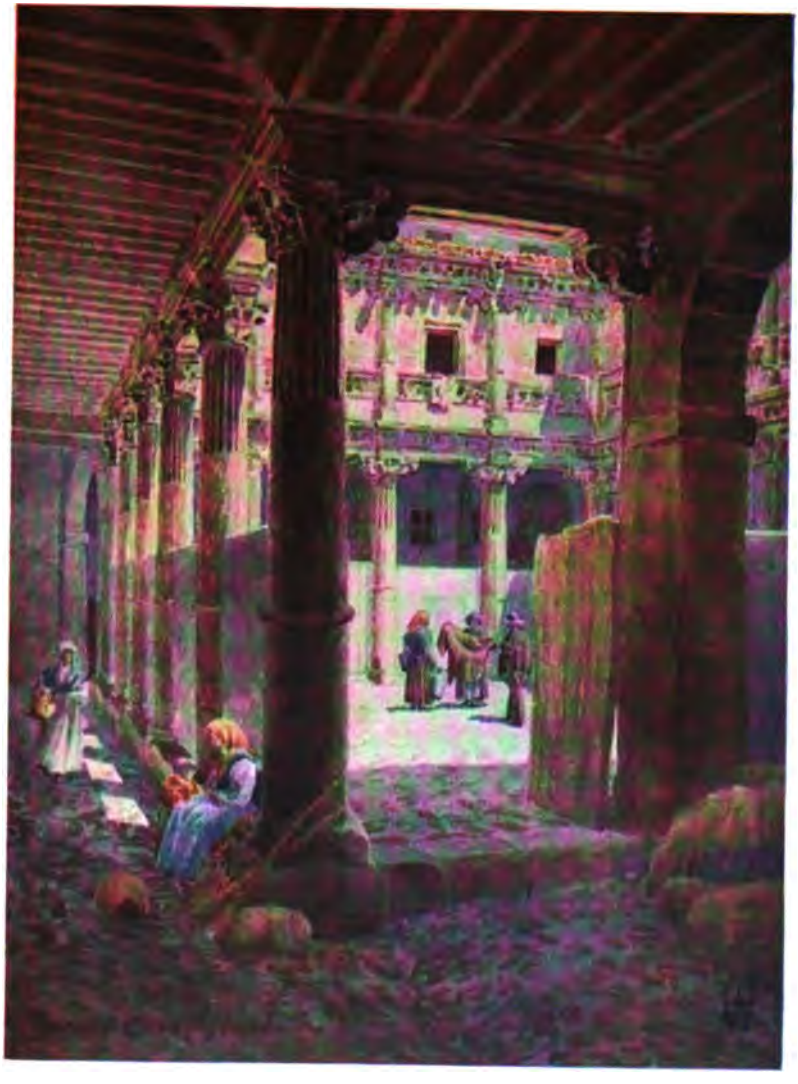
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BÚRGOS

Patio of the Casa de Miranda.

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him seat himself after dusk in front of the Café Suizo upon the Espolon. Then all the beauty and fashion turn out to promenade upon a regulation hundred yards of pavement, under the eyes of their fathers and brothers, who sit sipping their coffee and *anis* beneath the trees. A very handsome company they are; but, alas! their hats and frocks are mostly Parisian creations. That most graceful of all head-dresses, the *mantilla*, is reserved for state occasions, such as High Masses and Bull-fights. "Nothing is sacred to a sapper,"—nor to a milliner, unless it is new.

There is a cathedral at Búrgos; and we feel ourselves justified in mentioning it, because we heard it frankly admitted that it was "a vurry fine church *for such a small town.*" Our Amurrican Ruskin seemed to think it hardly class enough for Chicago; but in contests of this description the battle is not to the millionaire. The builder of the Escorial, for all his great possessions, knew that it was not for his craftsmen to rival the Cartuja tombs.[1]

Indeed, there is something overwhelming about the magnificence of Búrgos. It is rather German in character, as Leon is rather French. Yet

[1] See p. 281.

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though Juan de Colónia was a Rhinelander and Archbishop Maurice an Englishman, there is too much pure Spanish at Búrgos to assign all the credit to them. The building ranks as one of the wonders of Europe:—a cathedral perhaps as large as Canterbury, but finished throughout with the delicate extravagance of the *bijou* chapel of Roslin; —which, of course, is really Spanish also, if Scotchmen will excuse my saying so.

And, moreover, the splendour of the furniture is fully in keeping with the fabric: particularly the gorgeous metal *rejas*,—for what other craftsmen in Europe could vie with the Spanish smiths? Riches which might deck out a whole church among us lovers of bare walls are here found packed within the compass of a single chapel; and little gems of carving and inlay are thrust aside like lumber into corners where they can be scarcely seen. The whole is a dream of magnificence unsurpassable even in Italy: yet it is the gorgeous gloom of Toledo which still springs first to the memory when we contrast our own chaste chilly churches with the opulence of the shrines of Spain.

The cathedral stands upon steeply sloping ground well above the level of the Arlanzon. A long broad flight of steps leads up from the

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street to the south transeptal entrance; and from the pavement of the northern transept the noble staircase of Diego de Silöe climbs up to another street level upon the further side. Beyond it and above are piled the quaint red-roofed houses, clambering tier upon tier up the flanks of the escarpment; yet for all their aspirations the bare steep mound draws clear of them, and "Dubreton's thundering citadel" frowns alone upon the crest.

This castle has rather an unsatisfactory interest for Englishmen, for it was the obstacle which checked the advance of Wellington in his great campaign of 1812. It stands at the tip of a long tongue of high ground which runs up to the river almost at right angles; and this extreme end is separated from the rest of the ridge by a deep depression, so that it forms a sort of semi-detached hillock, shaped like a gigantic mole-hill some three hundred and fifty feet high. The castle is included within the circuit of the city walls; and the cathedral is so close beneath it that it is wonderful that it escaped destruction during the bombardment. Yet even the stained glass which once adorned the clerestory was only destroyed by the explosion which occurred the following year. The castle was once the royal residence of Castile: but

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nothing now remains of it except a few lines of grass-grown earthworks, which are utilised as rope-walks by the peaceful Burgalese. The modern fortress is on the hill of San Miguel, on the other side of the depression.

In Wellington's day San Miguel was merely an outwork. Its capture was a preliminary operation, and it was stormed early in the siege. With modern artillery such a *coup* would have been decisive. The citadel itself would have been blown over the pinnacles of the cathedral without more ado. But in those times the old line-of-battle ships fought their thirty-two pounders muzzle to muzzle, and "three or four feet between the mouths of your pistols" was considered "as good as a mile."

Wellington was, moreover, miserably provided with artillery, and the guns of the castle were far superior to his own. His troops were endeavouring to "tear down the ramparts with their naked hands"; and the conspicuous pillar which overlooks three counties from the lonely heights of Malvern, records the fate of the young heir of Eastnor who was killed while directing the approaches. A month's siege and five desperate assaults left the castle still unwon when the French

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BÚRGOS

From the East.

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armies had gathered to relieve it: and the besiegers with muffled wheels stole away over the bridges in the night-time. The campaign which began so gloriously at Salamanca[1] had ended in another retreat.

Yet the labour and carnage were not wasted. Joseph had neither time nor money to spend upon repairing the battered fortress, and next year the tide of war rolled back like the surge of the sea. Wellington, riding at the head of his troops across the hills from the westward, was saluted by the thunder of a terrific explosion which darkened the heavens above him and shook the ground beneath his feet. Then first, with stern elation, he recognised the presage of Vitória. His foes had despaired of resisting him. The castle of Búrgos was no more.

[1] See p. 161.

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CHAPTER XIV

ACROSS NAVARRE

It must give some flavour of unreality to our impressions of the Peninsula that we should not allude to the beggars until the ultimate chapter of all. And our only excuse for our negligence will sound like an aggravation of the error; for we hold that the Spanish beggar has been much over-advertised and does not (on his merits) deserve any more prominent place. The number of beggars in Spain varies directly in proportion to the number of tourists. They are most persistent at Búrgos; there is a moderate superfluity at Segóvia and Toledo: but in the out-of-the-way districts there is only the fundamental residue, and that (to speak frankly) we should be rather loth to spare.

"His honour the beggar, your brother"—the authorised official beggar—is a gentleman. He is frequently distinguished by a badge, like old Edie Ochiltree; and his resemblance to that worthy philosopher does not terminate with the

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badge. He is seldom unduly importunate. He begs "in God's name"; and when "in God's name" you implore him to excuse you, he seems to resignedly argue that such an adjuration would never be refused on insufficient grounds. His station is in the church porches; but he sometimes goes stumping the *calles*, and breathing a supplicating "*Ave Maria*" into every open door —an invocation which generally brings a very peppery blessing rattling down the staircase from the busy housewife overhead. And in fine, his entire demeanour is so eminently high-bred and dignified that it seems a privilege to oblige him. You feel as if you were conferring an obol on Belisarius, and are consequently on the best of terms with yourself for all the rest of the day.

This "Lord High Vagabond of the Stocks" is, however, not quite pushing enough for the era. In be-touristed cities he is swamped by an army of interlopers. These are perhaps most frequently children; but the tribe is bewrayed by their cry, — "*Perrita por pan!*[1] — *Señor-e-e-to! una*

[1] "A ha'penny for bread." The *perrita* or "little dog" = a halfpenny, and the *perro gordo* or fat dog = a penny. Thus "Two reals minus a little dog" is 45 *centimos*. The animal irrelevantly called a "dog" is the lion on the reverse of the coin.

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perr-e-e-ta!" a capital phrase for a beggar's whine! A small initiate was squatting beside me all the time I was sketching the Casa Miranda. She was engaged in coaching the baby—these were to be his first words. The baby being unresponsive, she maintained the refrain herself, at intervals of five minutes, in an uninterested semi-detached tone. If she got the *perrita* that would be so much profit; but she would not be depressed if she didn't—she was not so keen about the *pan*. The benevolent stranger is misled by their bare feet and rags and persistency, and imagines that they are all on the brink of starvation; but if he wants to see real poverty let him penetrate to the remoter villages—and he will find no beggars there. There more than once I have been humbled to the dust at having my "tip" politely spurned by the dignified ragamuffins who have rendered me some trifling service. And lest I should ruin their self-respect with coppers, I have been forced to undermine their constitutions with cigarettes.

The last beggars whom we encountered at Búrgos, however, were "right" beggars. They were clustering round the entrance of the great monastery of La Cartuja[1] de Miraflores, awaiting

[1] *Certosa.* Charterhouse.

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their daily dole. Everybody visits La Cartuja to see the marvellous tombs which Isabella erected for her father and brother—the masterpieces of *el mœstre* Gil; yet not the least attractive feature are the white-robed Carthusian brethren themselves, and the ragged mendicants "coming for their soup" according to the immemorial usage of old.

The convent stands about two miles from Búrgos, on a slight eminence to the right of the Pancorvo road, and was the last of the great monuments of the city that we passed on our departure towards the east. The road had been rising almost imperceptibly all the way from Valladolid. Gradually the fields had got greener and the trees more plentiful as we left the dun plains behind; and now a fine row of big shady elms introduced a welcome variety to the everlasting poplars and half-grown acacias which had been our only solace for many a sultry mile. The country, moreover, now begins to assume a more mountainous character. Away to the right rises the desolate Sierra de la Demanda, the northern outpost of the rugged ranges round Sória,—perhaps one of the wildest districts in all western Europe at the present day. The wolf and the boar still roam

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at will through its untrodden valleys, though I believe the bear now only survives in the Western Cantabrians and the Pyrenees. Here the venerable monastery of Silos lay securely hidden even from the sacrilegious Moors; and here in later years the dreaded *partidas* of Mina the *guerillero* were able to defy the utmost efforts of the French.

Our road passes only over the merest outskirts of these mountains, and leads us on through Briviesca by a long, gradual, and monotonous descent. Yet the gates of Castile are still before us, and we do not quit that most Spanish of provinces without seeing it once more in its sternest and wildest mood. North of the road lies the long level-topped ridge of the Montes Obarenes, a range not dissimilar to our own Mendips, and, like them, cleft with an unsuspected pass. For some distance we skirt the base of the hills; and then with a sharp turn to the left we dive suddenly into the grim defile of Pancorvo, a Deva gorge in miniature, where road, river, and railway jostle each other through a maze of fantastic limestone crags.

These mountain ramparts, pierced with their deep natural posterns, are a most characteristic feature of the Castilian frontiers; and probably that "Land of Castles" owes its name as much to

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THE GORGE OF PANCORVO

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them as to its man-built donjons and citadels. Indeed, it requires no very vivid imagination to discover the outlines of towers and battlements among the sheer bare weather-beaten stones. One magnificent imitation overshadowed our road in the *Serrania* of Cuenca, with keep and watch-tower and ballium as complete as a *Château Gaillard*. Another more ambiguous specimen we caught sight of in this very district;—one of those isolated conical hills crowned with a square rocky tooth, which are not uncommon in the neighbourhood of Pamplona. First it seemed that it was a rock,—then that it was a castle; and the balance of probability appeared to change every half mile. The road led straight up to our landmark and circled around the base, so that we saw it fairly close, and from three different sides; but whether it was really a rock or a castle we are not quite positive even to this day. There can be little doubt that it is to some of these *Fate Morgane* that we owe the old proverb concerning castles in Spain.

The northern face of the Montes Obarenes is much more broken than the southern; and as we run down from the pass into the pretty little town of Miranda, we may see, far away on our right,

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that other great notch to the eastward where the Ebro forces its passage out into the Rioja plains. The Ebro is but young up here in the Vizcayan highlands; yet it is already a fine broad river; and the massive old stone bridge of Miranda, flanked by quaint houses and churches, makes a singularly attractive sample of Spanish scenery to the tourist newly arrived from Bayonne.

The river breaks through the mountains some ten miles lower, by a gap between two rocky headlands, known as the cliffs of Bilibio and Buradon; and beyond are the tawny undulating plains around Haro,—a famous wine-growing district, whose vintages usually reach the English market under the name of Bordeaux, though they taste just as good under their own. The view (given in the illustrations as La Rioja Alavesa) is one which is very typical of Spanish inland scenery. But a special local touch is given by the Navarrese villages bunched together at the tops of their conical hills, like so many hedgehogs with their bristles out. Navarre was a buffer state in medieval times, and anyone who had nothing else to do used to kill time by invading it. The Navarrese villages were always upon the defensive,

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LA RIOJA ALAVESA

Looking Northwards across the Ebro.

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and evidently acquired the habit of arranging themselves to suit.

Meanwhile our road to Pamplona keeps still to the northward of the mountains, and, crossing the Ebro at Miranda, makes straight for the heights of Puebla and Morillas, which answer to the Montes Obarenes on the opposite side of the vale. The little river Zadora comes rippling out to meet us; and the gap from which it issues admits us into a wide level basin some ten miles in diameter, to which the Zadora itself forms a somewhat irregular chord. The ground on the left bank of the river rises considerably higher than on the right, and culminates in a little shaggy knoll which stands close beside our road. Watch for it, and do not pass it unnoticed; it is the "Englishmen's Hill." Well has it earned that name, for it has been twice baptized in the blood of our nation. Once when a detachment of the Black Prince's army, under the command of Sir Thomas Felton, fell fighting valiantly against thirty times their number on the eve of the battle of Navarrete.[1] Again when Picton's "fighting devils" came like a storm

[1] This incident has been utilised by Conan Doyle in his *White Company*. But that story rather exaggerates the height and steepness of the hill.

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against it in the crisis of the battle of Vitória, cutting their path through the centre of King Joseph's tottering array.

Salamanca was Wellington's most brilliant victory, but Vitória was unquestionably the ablest of his campaigns. This invasion was not like those that had gone before it—no mere sally from his impregnable mountain lines. At last he could wield an undivided command and an army as numerous as his opponents; and as he crossed the little frontier river Agueda, he had looked back to Portugal with a confident "adieu." Hill to the right and Graham to the left had already been slipped on their quarry; and against such a sweeping combination neither Tormes, Duero, nor Carrion could provide any adequate defence. Madrid was abandoned before him,—Búrgos was dismantled. And the retreating French convoys, with all their baggage, plunder, and munitions, were jammed in the city of Vitória at the head of the road to Bayonne.

Joseph sought to bar the advance at Pancorvo, and thought the defile was impregnable. He looked for assault from the southward, but the storm broke upon him from behind. Wellington had shifted his base by sea from Lisbon to

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Santander; and sweeping Reille and Maucune before him, came pouring down the Ebro from the north. The stroke was a *coup de Jarnac*, as fatal as it was unexpected. The heights of Obarenes and Morillas were no longer barring the way; and Joseph hastily fell back to the hills behind the Zadora, the only remaining position which he could possibly hope to defend.

As it was in the days of Las Navas de Tolosa, so was it also in this "crowning mercy" of the Peninsular War. It was a peasant who led Kempt's brigade over the unguarded bridge at Tres Pontes, and fell, like his prototype of the Morena, at the moment of the victorious attack. Clinging in desperation to each successive thicket and farmstead, the French were pushed remorselessly backward into the chaos of transport behind. And even more fatal than the frontal onset was the blow struck far to the left on the very confines of the plain. There Graham stormed the village of Gamarra Mayor, and shut off the flying army from the use of the great royal road. Nothing that ran upon wheels could go along the branch road to Pamplona. Guns, ammunition, treasure, baggage, and plunder all fell entire into the hands of the victors; and probably at the moment Joseph was

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very well contented that the prize was sufficiently valuable to effectually hamper the pursuit.

The battle was the ruin of Napoleon, as well as of his cause in the Peninsula. The struggle had sapped his strength for years, and the catastrophe came at the very crisis of his fate.[1] Among all his enterprises there had been none more thoroughly inexcusable;—wantonly conceived, treacherously undertaken, ruthlessly carried out. As great a blunder in statecraft as it was an outrage on humanity. "The Spanish canker destroyed him"; and so in bare justice it should.

Our route follows the track of the flying army along a deep green Navarrese valley between lofty and cliff-like hills. By its side runs the single line which connects Madrid with the frontier; but this turns off to the north about halfway to Pamplona, making for San Sebástien and Irun.

The villages are much devoted to *Pelota*[2]; and few are too poor to possess some species of primitive court. Those in the larger towns are most imposing erections; but any bare wall will do, and some of the churches have hoisted pathetic petitions that the parishioners will not practise against the

[1] During the sitting of the Congress of Dresden.

[2] A highly developed form of Fives.

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MIRANDA DEL EBRO

A Corner in the Town.

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walls *during the hours of divine service.* The houses themselves seem almost built with a view to the pastime, for they are solid square stone buildings, shouldering close up against the roadway; and their blank expanses of ashlar are persistently commandeered by the boys.

Pelota is exclusively a Basque game. In Castile and Leon the men are content with skittles, and the boys are generally engrossed in the enacting of miniature bull-fights—a game in which the star performer invariably elects to play bull. Dancing is, of course, an amusement which is common to all provinces and to both sexes: but a game in the English significance is an institution which seldom appeals to the southern mind.

In this district, however, the cyclist provides a good deal of salutary exercise for the conscientious toll-keeper. For the Basque roads are not national but provincial, and the provinces maintain them by taking tolls. The stranger, however, is not generally aware of this custom; and as the toll-bars are quite unobtrusive, he rides innocently past them on his way. His first intimation takes the shape of a breathless and howling *caminero* sprinting desperately along the road behind him,

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and smarting under the conviction that he is being wilfully bilked.

Some little distance before we reach Pamplona we pass one of the most remarkable examples of rock formation that is to be met with even in Spanish hills. Here the deep glen of Larraun debouches upon the main valley, and across its mouth is drawn a huge natural wall of precipitous limestone which can hardly be less than a thousand feet high. The top is serrated, but both faces are equally sheer; and the thickness at the base is not relatively greater than one would expect in an artificial masonry dam. Probably, indeed, it was a natural dam originally, retaining a vast reservoir in the vale behind; but now it is cleft in the centre from top to base with a huge gash, clean-cut and narrow; and through this stupendous portal the little river issues from the vale.

Pamplona stands in the centre of an amphitheatre of mountains, rising out of the level arena on a sort of daïs covered with walls and spires. It is the chief of the northern frontier fortresses; but its bastions date mostly from the days of Vauban, and its strength (from a modern military standpoint) must depend on the forts which cap the neighbouring hills. The cathedral is an interesting

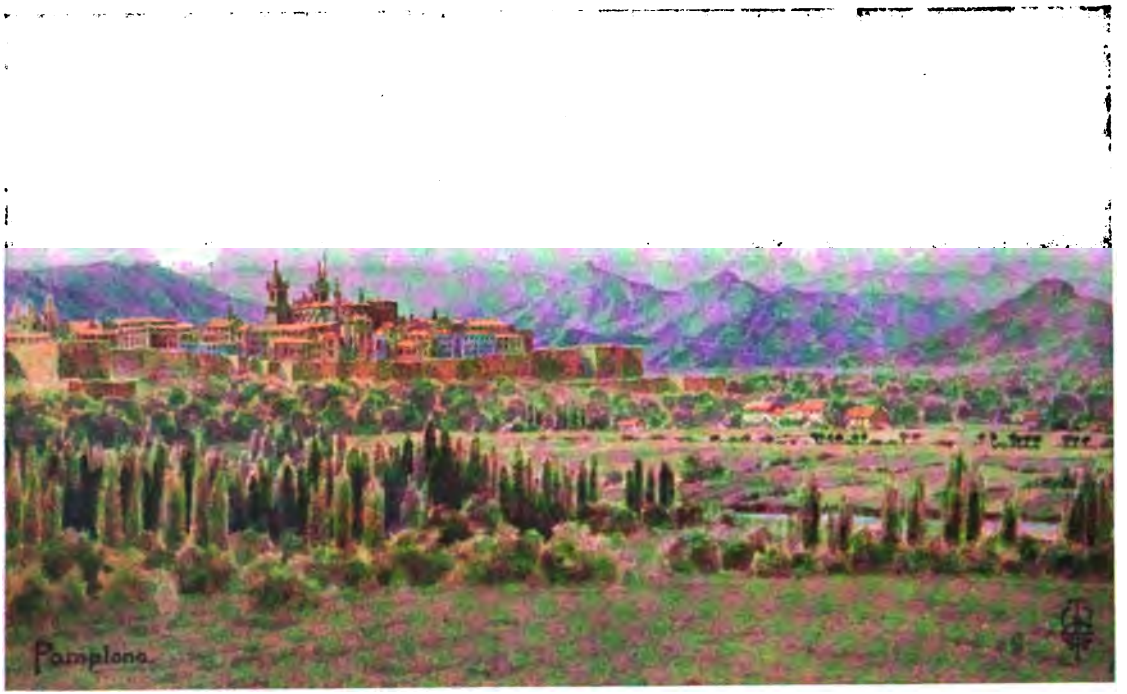
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PAMPLONA

From the Road to the Frontier.

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building, and possesses a most lovely cloister; but the town generally is not very attractive to the artist, though it forms a good "jumping-off place" for exploring the country around.

The bare, windy wastes that stretch away from the city towards the Pyrenean foot-hills are not altogether so tenantless as they seem to a casual view. Several of the villages still bear traces of ancient prosperity;—Estella, charmingly situated in a rocky hollow; Sangüesa, with its noble monastery; Olite, once the Windsor of Navarre. The last-named might almost rank as a working model for an antiquarian. Its lanes are packed with the decaying mansions of the long-departed courtiers, and dominated by the huge ruined castle which was the home of the warrior kings. This palatial stronghold is noted as one of the finest examples in the Peninsula: a match for our own Bamburgh or Warkworth, and consequently with few rivals in the world.

As the capital of Navarre, Pamplona has, of course, been pre-eminent for its sieges; and it was in one of these that Ignatius Loyola received the wound which converted him from a dandy into an ascetic, and led to the foundation of the Order of Jesuits. But the siege which possesses

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the greatest interest for an Englishman is that undertaken by the Duke of Wellington after Vitória; the enterprise which led to that series of desperate struggles usually lumped together vaguely as "the Battles of the Pyrenees."

The sieges of San Sebástien and Pamplona had been undertaken simultaneously; but neither made very rapid progress, and Soult was not the man to let them fall without an attempt to come to their aid. He had re-formed the wrecks of Joseph's army on the French side of the frontier; and advancing towards the passes of Maya and Roncesvalles, he assailed them both suddenly the same day. The detachments which guarded them were overpowered after a most resolute resistance, and Soult pushed down the valleys towards Pamplona, reuniting his forces on the road. Wellington had expected that the blow would be aimed at San Sebástien. He was momentarily outwitted; but he recovered just in time. Soult found his path barred at the fatal ridge of Saurauren,—just outside the Pamplona basin, and literally within sight of his goal. The beleaguered garrison heard the roar of that furious battle; they could watch the smoke-wreaths curling above the intervening ridge. But no French standards appeared in the

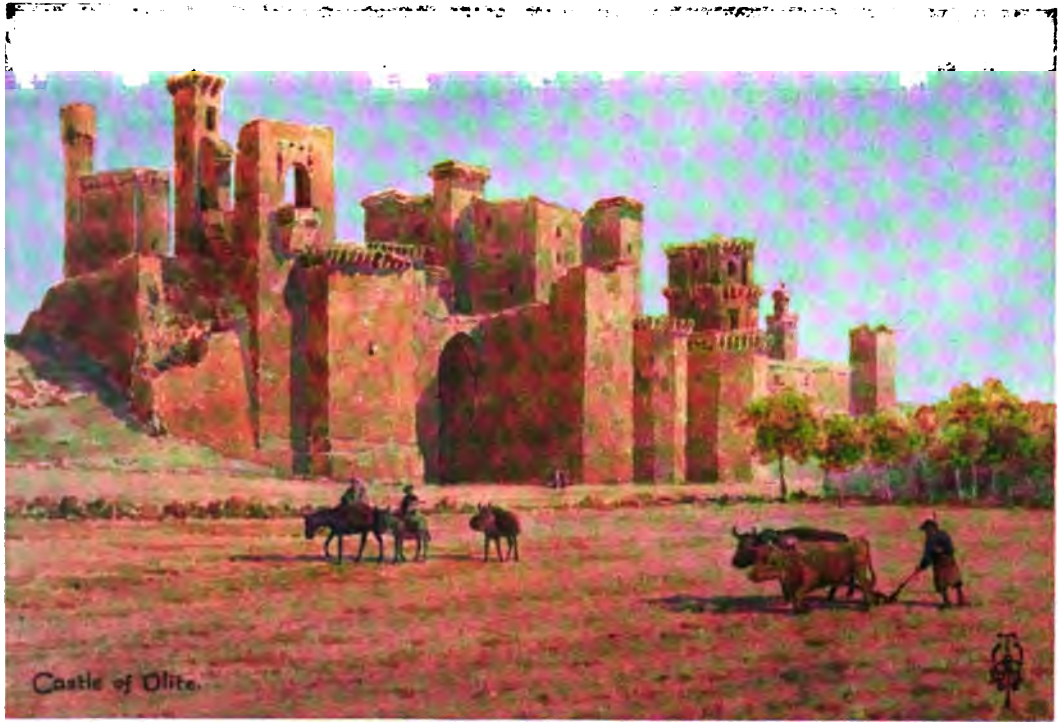
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OLITE

The Castle.

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mouth of the pass in the evening. When the battle was renewed two days later, the English were the assailants; and Soult and his beaten army could barely find safety in flight.

Saurauren was Wellington's last great battle on Spanish soil. A few weeks later the two great fortresses had fallen, and—first of all the allied Generals—he carried the war into France. Five years previously he had landed in Portugal—a "Sepoy General," little more distinguished than Cornwallis or Eyre Coote. But those five years in the Peninsula had fixed his reputation for ever; and the giant who crossed the Bidassoa had but little to add to his stature on the field of Waterloo.

There is a choice of two roads from Pamplona to the frontier. The *kilos* are reckoned from Maya; but Roncesvalles bears the more historic name. In point of scenery there is little to choose between them; but perhaps Maya is the harder journey, for Maya includes Vellate, and this extra pass is the loftiest of the three.

The country towards Roncesvalles is at first much less mountainous in character than that towards Vitória; for the high peaks of the Pyrenees lie in the centre of the range, to the eastward; and those immediately before us, though wild and rugged,

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do not show up very imposingly above the lofty levels upon the Spanish side. Near Pamplona the meadows are green and civilised, but the view becomes sterner and more barren as we draw near to the feet of the hills; and presently we enter a long, narrow, rocky gully—the bed of a mountain river—whose steep, bare sides are dotted with trim little bushes of box. How hot it was in that narrow gully! The sun's rays poured vertically into the breathless hollow, and their heat was radiated by every burning stone. Even the six-inch shadows of the box bushes were quoted at fancy values; and shedding our outer garments one after another, we eventually emerged at the further end in an almost aboriginal state.

"Are you thinking of resuming the garb of civilisation?" enquired one vagabond of another, as we halted for a moment on the little bridge near the village of Burguete. "I am thinking of resuming the garb of Adam," retorted his comrade desperately, as he glared into the pool beneath. It was rather a public place for a bathe; but there are no passengers on a Spanish road at *Comida* time. And as that meal is invariably unpunctual, we knew that the little *Fonda* could be reached in plenty of time.

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Burguete stands in the centre of a little cup-like valley; and prominent upon the further lip rises a big domed hill, one of the flankers of the pass. It is a sleek, smooth mountain, upholstered with green turf, and spangled with grazing sheep; and the big round beeches and chestnuts herd together all over its crest, as domesticated as on an English lawn. Yet the little hillock beneath it was the scene of one of the greatest of tragedies; for there stood the abbey of Roncesvalles, the sepulchre of Charlemagne's slaughtered Peers.

A good deal of controversial ink has been spilt over Charlemagne's famous Spanish expedition: and all the confusion of history has been worse confounded by romance. The French Epics tell of it as a glorious and successful crusade, undertaken in the cause of Christendom against the insolence of the Moors. The Emperor dictated his own terms in his enemy's palace at Córdova, and it was only the treachery of Ganelon that led to the regrettable incident at the end. Very different is the story of the Spanish ballads. Their bards were most wofully sceptical of religious and disinterested invasion; they wished to be left to fight out their own quarrels with their own infidels, and felt no sort of satisfaction at the prospect of

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Spain becoming a province of the Franks. It was their own native heroes, Bernardo del Carpio and the chivalry of Leon, who overthrew the Paladins at Roncesvalles. Is not Roland's "Durandal" in the armoury of Madrid to this day, to prove that the Spaniard was the better man?

In truth the expedition was directed against the newly-established Caliphate of Córdova, in alliance with Suleiman Ibn-al-Arabi, the Moorish king of Barcelona, who was jealous of Abderahman's growing power. Charlemagne captured Pamplona (which was Christian), and obtained some acknowledgment of suzerainty from the Sheikhs of Gerona and Huesca. But Zaragoza held out against him with all its traditional obstinacy: the ill-matched allies could by no means pull together; and the campaign fizzled out abortively without any substantial gain. As for the dolorous rout which concluded it, that was the work of neither Goth nor Moor, but of the angry Basques of the mountains, a nation whom Charlemagne had not regarded, and whom he probably despised. They had seen their country pillaged, their capital Pamplona taken; and now, when the rearguard was entangled in the mountains, they at last got the chance of plunder and revenge. No doubt

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PAMPLONA

A Patio near the Cathedral.

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they trapped them in that long rocky defile—straggling, way-worn, and cumbered with plunder and baggage—a position as hopeless as Elphinstone's in the Koord Kabul. The disjointed line was toiling painfully along the gullet; the slippery screes rose unscalable on either side; and the jutting crags that frowned at every corner afforded both ramparts and missiles to the unwearable mountaineers. None but the doughtiest warriors could have succeeded in breaking out into the basin of Burguete. And here their superior arms and discipline would enable them to fight their way across to the further side. Only one short ascent still remained to be surmounted; but their active enemy was before them, and the task was beyond their power. Wounded and exhausted, they drew together in a rallying square upon the little hillock; and there, fighting desperately, they were cut down to a man.

The course of that fight is retold in the very conformation of the valley, yet somehow the picture is inadequate. The drama is not quite worthily staged. The place is too homely and pastoral for the scene of that great Saga which Taillefer chanted between the embattled hosts at Hastings; and which has since thrilled the hearts of generations

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of warriors, as Sidney's was thrilled by the tale of Chevy Chase. We need a more rugged environment for the memory of a departed demi-god. "He who aspires to be a hero," said Dr Johnson, "should drink brandy!" And perhaps, while he is about it, he might get killed in a Deva gorge.

There is a softer lay for the minstrel who would linger by the braes of Burguete; a tale of two true lovers, who, as usual, were distressingly ill-starred. Their story is even more ancient than the doughty deeds of arms that we have just been rehearsing; for it relates to the days of Charlemagne's illustrious grand-sire, Charles Martel. Othman ben Abu Neza, the Moorish warden of the marches, had espoused a Christian bride, Lampegia, daughter of Duke Eudo of Aquitaine; and fleeing with her across the mountains to seek refuge from his indignant suzerain, was overtaken in the pass of Roncesvalles, and slain in his lady's arms. The unemotional historian is convinced that the marriage was political, and hints that both Eudo and Othman were conspiring against their respective liege lords. But at least he will grant us a certificate as to the authenticity of the final catastrophe: and he flatly declines to go further even for Roland and his Peers.

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Battlefields lie thick in Navarre, and even the Vale of Thorns is not absolutely the last of them. A second battle of Roncesvalles was contested upon the heights of Altobiscar, at the very crest of the Pass, in 1813. Here the British had been posted for six weeks, covering the blockade of Pamplona; and had greatly vexed the soul of their general by persistently deserting in twos and threes every night.

Why these seasoned soldiers, at this very hour of their triumph, should have been seized with so strange an epidemic, is a problem which might take a good deal of arguing. The only contemporary theory was the suggestion that they were finding things slow! But their fighting qualities did not seem to have got much affected. Soult finally attacked them in person with much superior numbers: and they offered a most resolute resistance, only giving ground after night-fall, when it was evident they were being outflanked. Cole, the hero of Albuera, led them stubbornly back along the mountain ridges towards Pamplona; and the act was played out at Saurauren, where he arrived just in time to seize the hill.

The ascent of the Pass upon the Spanish side is but trifling. A few brisk turns in the track, and

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we have climbed from the abbey ruins to the summit of the *col* behind. Before us the road to France drops coil below coil into the deep green valley, a long descent of over three thousand feet. The actual frontier is some dozen miles further, at the village of Valcarlos; where a modest little bridge, shepherded by a horde of sentries, spans the waters of the infant Nive. But the spirit of Spain lags behind us up here upon this breezy saddle. Here is the true parting of the nations; and as we turn our faces plainwards, we feel that we are taking our leave.

Farewell and adieu to you, fair Spanish ladies!
Farewell and adieu to you, ladies of Spain!
For we've received orders to cross the salt waters;
We hope before long we shall see you again!

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